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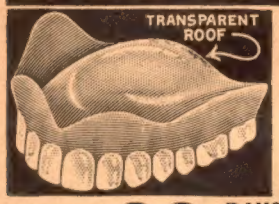

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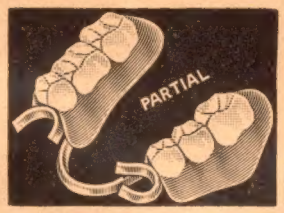

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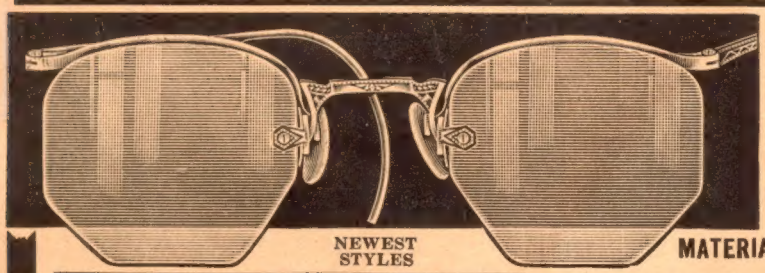

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GOOD RADIO JOBS

BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS,** a booming field today, (lower illustration) pays many Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time.

Here is a quick way to better pay. Radio offers you the opportunity to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full-time Radio jobs paying up to $50 a week. MAIL COUPON. Get my Sample Lesson FREE. Examine it, read it—see how easy it is to understand. See how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Operator or Radio Technician.

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a part time Radio Technician to make good money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable, practical experience. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my Lesson Texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

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J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2ES9
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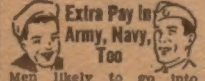

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JUNE ISSUE ON SALE MAY 8TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 107, No. 1 for May, 1942 Best of New Stories

Everest Tiger . . . . . HAL G. EVARTS 11
Scheer was the most expert mountaineer Passang had ever guided. The trouble was—he had no *feeling*, for mountains or anything else.

Come On and Fight! (a novelette) . . . . . LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH 20
That was the challenge Fred Meade flung at Brad Pace, the man he'd once idolized as the greatest flyer in Alaska. But Pace—sick, broke and with a murder charge hanging over him—had given up the battle. So there was only one thing for the kid to do—drag the stubborn old fool back up to the heights again in spite of himself.

A Bottle a Day . . . . . RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS 48
Information for the H.O. was what Fordyce's daily bottle was supposed to contain—not lousy limericks about his skipper. But even bum verse cast upon the water can bear surprising fruit in war time.

Black Pigeons . . . . . WALTER C. BROWN 58
For centuries the men of the Lung-shan had held their hills inviolate against all invaders—even the great Khan himself. But now the Japs were attacking with their iron devil-machines, and the ancient tactics of the Sons of the Dragon would have to be revised.

Hell and Hawkins . . . . . L. L. FOREMAN 67
It took quite a jolt to get Little John Free back on the manhood-tempering trail his father had hewed out of the Apache-ridden wilderness.

A God With Clay Feet . . . . . CHARLES T. S. GLADDEN 78
A submarine skipper has to be just an inch short of God to his men. Commander Lane was only midget size when he took over the *Neptune* but sailors sprout up fast in the Pacific these days.

Live by the Sword (conclusion) . . . . . F. R. BUCKLEY 84
Commingled to the death the stars of Borgia and Torella arc across the black Romagna sky—one to shine on; the other to fade away, leaving naught but an empty boast graven on a sword.

Whale Hunters of the Hudson River (a fact story) . . BRIAN O'BRIEN 104
When Paul Revere made his famous ride he carried more than news of the redcoats. He brought America's greatest trade to the Hudson.

The Camp-Fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 113

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Lost Trails . . . . . Where old paths cross 121

Cover painted for Adventure by Stockton Mulford

Kenneth S. White, Editor

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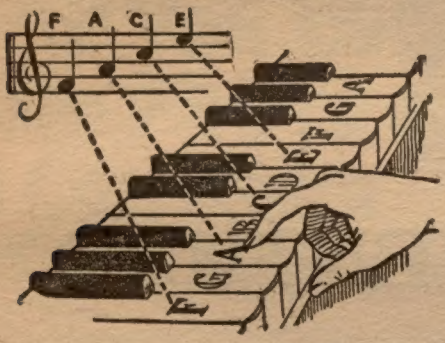

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Piano Accordion	Banjo	Ukulele
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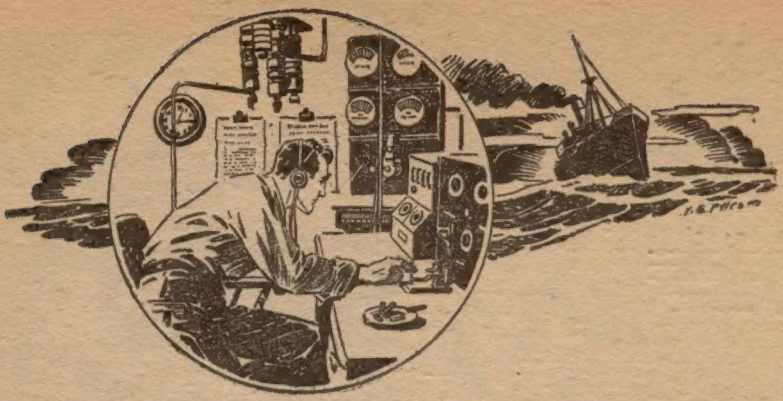
☐ Check here if under 16 years of age.



ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

SPARKS in the Merchant Marine.

Request:—1. What are some of the requirements, besides a Federal license, for becoming a radio operator in the Merchant Marine?

2. Is it possible to wear glasses and still be accepted if you are otherwise physically perfect, and the glasses correct the eye fault?

3. What is the rate of pay, and rank of an operator? Is he an officer or a seaman?

4. Is he draft-exempt?

5. Does he wear a specific uniform? Who buys it, the operator or the company? How much does it cost?

6. Does it resemble a U. S. Naval officer's uniform? How does it differ? Does it have epaulets? What is the insignia on the cap, chest, shoulders, sleeves?

7. Does one have to belong to a union? Is it difficult to secure a berth? Is it necessary to have a license?

8. Can one sit for a mate's license without perfect eyes? How many months at sea are necessary in order to sit for a license as a third mate?

9. What advancement in rank and pay is there for an operator? How many hours is he on duty aboard ship? Aboard a freighter? A tanker? A passenger ship?

10. Is the pay higher aboard a tanker?

—Bernard Wild

Reply by Gordon MacAllister:—Your interesting letter received. I shall attempt to answer your questions in the order you ask them.

(1) The other requirements for a wireless operator in the Merchant Marine besides a license from the Federal Bureau of Communications are good health, moral conduct, sobriety, responsibility, interest, willingness, etc.

(2) It is possible to wear glasses and still be a wireless operator.

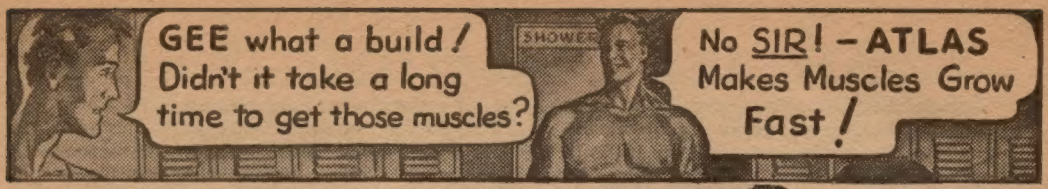
(3) The rate of pay depends on the grade of license held and the rank or grade of the operator, i.e., chief, first assistant, second, etc. The pay during war-time is considerably higher than that of peace-time. It averages from about $150 to $180 a month. A radio operator is considered an officer, in that he dines in the officers' mess and bunks in the officers' quarters. When I was at sea, Sparks was (on most of the ships I was in) neither fish nor fowl, i.e., he was not a navigating officer or engineer officer, but a necessary complement considered in a class all by himself.

(4) He is not draft-exempt by law, no Merchant Marine officer is unless he is a member of the U. S. Merchant Marine Naval Reserve. But I believe it is the practice of the draft boards, at least some boards, to consider such a person essential to defense, therefore if he is on a ship, he remains there.

(5) He wears a regular officer's uniform. He almost always purchases his own uniforms. The cost depends on the tailor. A blue uniform costs about $40. A set of whites (jacket and trousers of white duck) costs about $7.00. A set of Hong Kongs about the same. Caps sell for about $3.00.

(6) It resembles a Naval officer's uni-

(Continued on page 8)



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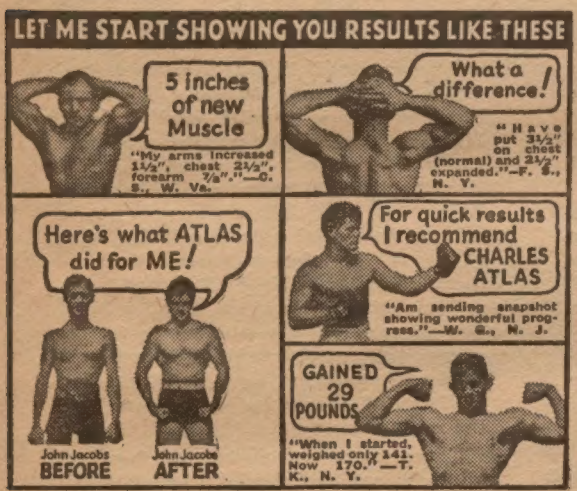
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Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

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(Please print or write plainly)

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(Continued from page 6)

form in that it too is blue and has brass buttons. Whites are almost identical, except for the cap insignia and the insignia on the shoulder bars. A Naval officer of the line wears a gold star on his bars. A wireless operator wears gold "sparks." The gold stripes are practically identical. The buttons differ in that a W.O.'s buttons bear the Company flag or insignia. The cap insignia differs from a Naval officer's in that it bears also the Company flag or insignia instead of the American eagle and anchor. The gold stripes on the sleeve are the same except there is a gold "sparks" above the stripe instead of a star.

(7) Most operators belong to a union, either A. F. of L. or C. I. O. It is not difficult to secure a berth today. It is necessary to have a license.

(8) One must have perfect eyesight to sit for a mate's license. It takes about four years as Able Seaman before one can sit for a third mate's ticket.

(9) An operator may advance from junior to chief. His pay increases with each promotion. If there are three operators in a ship, each works eight hours. If only two, they divide the time between them. Freighters usually carry only one operator, he is on duty "24 hours a day." A tanker usually carries one operator. Passenger ships from one to four.

(10) All ratings from ordinary seaman to master generally receive more pay aboard tankers.

GEM-hunting for pleasure rather than profit.

Request:—I am starting a hobby of collecting gem stones of California. I would like to have some information on them as to their whereabouts and how to find them. Is there any special way of identifying their locality. Would you give me some reference that would help.

—John Teschler

Reply by Victor Shaw:—First item necessary for gem prospecting is a kit of tools, which should include a prospecting pick, geologist's hammer, rock chisels, a small goldpan, a hardness gauge, and a magnifying glass. Chisels may be made and tempered by any blacksmith, 7-8 inches long of ⅞-inch steel, one with chisel bit, the other with round point. Have sample-sacks of No. 8 canvas, notebook, pencil and a small rucksack to pack them.

California has many varieties of gem stones and gem minerals, in spots where rocks are favorable. The deserts offer good places, because there are numerous pegmatite dikes, one of the best places to hunt them. These dikes are found in granite foothills, but broad *flat* areas usually are barren of gem materials. You should have a few books and one good for you is "Gemstones of California," by Geo. F. Kuntz. It is Bulletin No. 37, issued thru Calif. Bureau of Mines, Ferry Bldg., San Francisco, but I think you can get a copy from Technical Book Co., 808 So. Spring St., Los Angeles. Good general book is Gems & Gem Minerals, Kraus & Slauson, price $3.50, with colored plates of all principal gem stones. The Tech. Book Co. will have this one.

One fine field is at Pala and Grande Mesa, having pink lepidolite with inclusive crystals of rubellite, also kunzite and tourmalines. Pala is 20 miles east of Oceanside on road to Lake Henshaw. Mesa Grande is 4 miles west of Lake Henshaw, on road from lake to San Diego. If you go to Pala contact Albert Everitt, minerals dealer, on Chestnut St., Escondido. He'll tell you how to get to mineral fields. Get satin spar in dry lakes of desert—obsidian in Owens Valley—opals 25 miles N. E. of Barstow—ruby and sapphire east end of Kingston Mts., San Bernardino Co.—turquoise in the coarse pegmatites in the northeast part of San Bernardino County. These are varieties of corundum, as are most of the rarer gems.

There are many quartz gems too, and all these are explained in fullest detail in a book by Dake, Fleener and Wilson, called: "Quartz Family," which is priced at $2.50. The Tech. Book Co. have this one too.

You also find topaz and green-blue-rose beryls in pegmatite dikes, of the south-California deserts. Also various kinds of agates, which belong to the quartz family gems, also moss agate, garnets and others.

Ramona offers a good mineral field also, this town being between Lake Henshaw and San Diego.

You'll use the goldpan in your kit chiefly to pan sands for the small fragments of minerals to trace up. A pan will show you grains or tiny pieces of pegmatite, that can be followed along to find the dike. It will also pan out garnets, which are plentiful in the desert sands.

I'll mention that to prospect the Pala,

(Continued on page 122)

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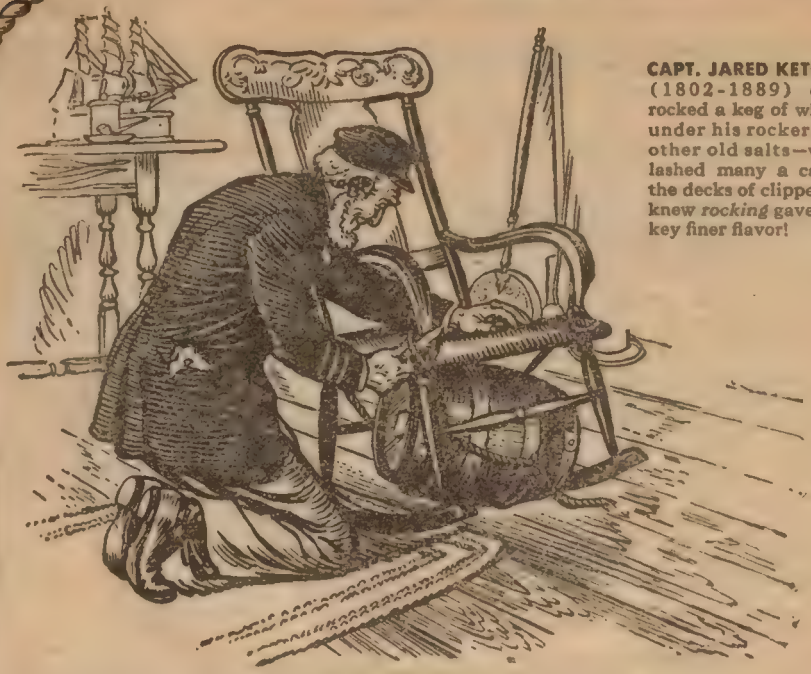

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EVEREST TIGER

By HAL G. EVARTS

ILLUSTRATED
BY
HAMILTON GREENE

THE snow would come soon. For days it had been threatening and now it was overdue. Passang gazed up toward the pass. Here on the roof of the world everything was gray—the cliffs, the scuds of fog, the sky itself. And when the snow came it too would be gray.

Passang, the Sherpa guide, knew this from experience. He knew also the risk of crossing Chedo La so late in the year. He knew that it might even be wrong, that which he was doing, but a man has pride in anything done well.

Over his shoulder he said in English: "This afternoon, I think."

The man behind, the tall well-knit German named Scheer, said with a hissing outlet of breath; "Let's hurry, then, before it begins."

He hissed like that, not because he was winded, but to save his wind. He was full of little tricks—tricks to hoard his energy and fight back at the mountains—but Passang didn't grin. In the first place the German was too good a mountaineer. In the second place he wasn't the sort you laughed at.

"If it begins it begins," Passang murmured, and lengthened his stride, leaning forward into the shoulder straps of his pack. He was a chunky brown little man with knotty calves and a deep chest. He had ruddy cheeks and straight black hair that shone silver above the ears, but he wasn't old. He was in his prime.

"How much farther?" Scheer breathed.

At regular intervals for the past three days as they crawled ant-like across the vast Himalayan solitude Scheer had asked the same question. Always he was calculating and planning. "Only another mile," Passang said. "Like this." He made a gesture straight up.

Another five thousand feet to the Chedo crest, mostly rope work. It was dangerous any time. It was very dangerous now. Unless they beat the storm.

The fog eddied, revealing momentarily the valley far below from which they had climbed. To the north the Himalayas extended in a saw-tooth wall along the Nepal-Tibet-British India border. Passang's blood quickened as he caught a glimpse of a distant triumvirate, for that was Everest, the world's tallest peak, and he, Passang, was an Everest Tiger.

He was the most respected man in his village. Or had been once.

"The snow will be an advantage," Scheer said. "It will cover our tracks."

"No one will follow us," Passang said.

"How long will it take?" Scheer persisted.

Passang shrugged. "Depends. Tonight, maybe, with luck. But if it snows—"

"Tonight," Scheer said, "we'll sleep on top."

AN ICY particle brushed Passang's cheek. Then another. A drop of moisture trickled down his jaw and inside the collar of his windbreaker. In a few seconds the air was full of hovering, fluttering flakes. So it had come. Sooner than he expected.

He was glad, somehow. He stopped and set down his pack. The German stopped a few feet away and trapped a few crystals in his palm. "Good," he said. "Now they can't see us with binoculars."

"It's bad," Passang corrected. "No one is following us, or watching us either."

"You told me that before. But I take no chances."

He even plans the weather, Passang thought. He had never taken out a German before, and he wondered if they all harped on distance and speed and altitude like this one did. "It will be terrible up there," he said. "You have no idea."

"No idea?" Scheer laughed—a harsh, jarring sound. "I've climbed the Matterhorn in a blizzard! And do you know the south face of Jungfrau? Your Himalayas aren't the only ones!"

It was true; Scheer was an expert. But he had not lost two frozen toes on Rongbuk Glacier; nor his right eye from snow-blindness above Camp III. He was not the idol of Jopokhri village, who wanted its youth to grow to manhood as Everest Tigers. He did not know these mountains.

"I'm warning you," Passang said. "That's all."

"You think I'm going back?" Scheer's blue eyes glittered with the brightness of glacier ice.

"No," said Passang. "I don't." They were trapped in a mountain crotch. To the north lay the impassable Himalayas. To the south, the Chedo Pass. Behind, in the valley, the way they had come, was certain capture and prison. "But you will die up here alone."

"I won't die here—alone." Scheer blocked the trial with his body.

Passang hesitated. Other men risked their lives to conquer high places, but they never threw them away. This man reminded him of a widow he had once seen who was about to commit *suttee* on her husband's funeral pyre.

"I won't die alone," Scheer repeated in a soft voice, "because you're taking me on to the top."

卐

FOUR days ago it had begun. Passang had been overhauling his gear in the hovel where he lived at Jopokhri when a boy brought him a fifty rupee note from the German.

Passang had struggled to put the matter from his mind, pretending he didn't know. But he did know, because twice before the German had sent for him, and twice he'd refused. Passang needed money, and money was the one thing Scheer could smuggle in.

So with uneasy conscience he sauntered across to the internee camp to return the bill. Scheer was waiting for him in the prison yard, behind a wire fence. They edged around a corner, out of sight of the Ghurka guard, and the German talked fast.

"Everything's arranged. After evening roll call I'll leave my cell and cut through the fence. You will be ready on the Chedo trail with all necessary equipment. I won't be missed until breakfast, which gives us a twelve hour start."

He had been caught in India by the outbreak of war. Later, with a few Italian civilians and some Bengali agitators, he'd been interned in isolated Jopokhri for the duration. There was only a handful of guards and no Englishman within miles, so escape from the camp was simple.

But escape from the Himalayas was something else.

Passang had told him: "I advise you to go down toward the plains and the railroad. The way you were brought in."

"They'd expect me to do just that." The German's tone was contemptuous. "I'd be caught by daybreak."

Passang shook his head and edged away, but Scheer whispered: "A thousand chips if you get me over the pass to Garmandu."

The Sherpa was not quick with the English tongue. He had been educated in a Darjeeling mission school, he'd portered for all the Everest expeditions; he'd guided English tourists on holidays in the foothills. But still he was not quick in English. "No," he'd said automatically.

"Perhaps you love the British," Scheer sneered, "because they use you for a beast of burden. You carry their oxygen tanks and their shelters and food on your back, and what do you get for it? They call you Tiger."

Passang flushed. British expeditions no longer came to try Everest, nor tourists for the view. The war had finished all that. He was the most respected man in his village, but he could not eat respect, or wear respect. And to a man without a trade one thousand chips meant much. It meant he could last until better days returned.

"Or perhaps you're afraid of Chedo La," Scheer said, pressing his advantage.

It was the final taunt that had settled Passang. "I'll think of it," he said. But he knew he would meet the German that night.

PASSANG made no effort to dodge as Scheer took a step toward him. He didn't fear the German, but with such a man he could never be sure.

For three days and nights they'd traveled hard, working toward the summit. The escape had been carefully planned, like everything the German did. There had been no pursuit. That he might attempt the pass apparently hadn't occurred to the Ghurka prison patrol.

Luck had been with them too. Since sneaking out of Jopokhri they hadn't passed anyone; anyone who might carry word back to the authorities of a Sherpa bearer and a strange European. But their luck was running out.

"If you go back now," Scheer said, "you'll be arrested for helping an enemy alien."

It was a shrewd thrust, Passang realized. Of course he could deny any part in the affair, but he'd have to explain his

★ ★

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He crouched in the shelter of a bank, mumbling to a whirling prayer wheel.

absence. It would be much simpler for him if the German got away. And the German knew it. He had even planned that.

Suddenly Passang's eyes widened. "Look!" he said, pointing down-trail.

Scheer backed around cautiously, still watching Passang. A red blur was moving through the swirl of gray. They waited in tense silence until a lama rounded the next bend.

"It may be a trap!" Scheer crouched behind a boulder.

Passang flung up an arm. "The fool!" he muttered. "The crazy fool!"

The lama moved slowly, leaning on a staff. He was wrapped in the coarse woolens of his order, and wore a skull cap with fur flaps pulled over his ears. When he came close they could see a pair of faded eyes and a leathery face seamed with lines.

"*Uji,*" he said in Tibetan, and stuck out his tongue. "Greetings to you."

Passang did not share the Sherpa awe of priests; he had been too much among foreigners. Angrily, he said to the old man: "Why do you come here? Why don't you stay where you belong?"

The monk seemed not to have heard. He brushed the snow from his cloak with deliberate strokes. "Is this the road to Garmandu?" he said.

"Yes, this is the road! But it's not the road for you! Go back!" The old one was mad. He would totter around till he fell in a canyon. Passang had troubles enough already.

Scheer straightened up. "What's he want?"

"My good fortune." The monk was apologetic as he clicked the rosary around his neck. "I am on pilgrimage. I feared I had lost the way."

"The way for you is the other way. The pass is closed."

"I am on pilgrimage," the lama repeated, and his mouth set in a stubborn line. "There is no merit in the easy way."

Passang translated for the German. Scheer was scowling as he finished. He said: "We can't send him back. He'd talk. Then they'd be waiting to grab us on the other side."

With a sense of helpless exasperation Passang nodded agreement. He was not superstitious. He didn't believe the gibberish of the lamaseries. But if a holy man wanted to go on crazy errands, it was none of his business. As for the German, what happened once they reached Garmandu was none of his business either. There were many people in the plains below who had no love for the British, who would pass him along the underground from city to city, until he reached the coast and freedom.

His business, now, was to get them both across the pass, somehow.

"We're wasting time," Scheer snapped.

"You will travel with us then," Passang told the old man gruffly, because he could think of no alternative.

He moved off in the lead, with snow driving hard. Above its rushing hiss he could scarcely hear the clomp of Scheer's hobnails and the squish of the lama's boots in the rear. His own soggy shoes found an even pace and held it.

THE trail steepened and gradually lost itself among forming drifts. They were climbing vertically now, using hands as well as feet. They diagonaled across a slide face and threaded up a slope on the opposite side, leaving the last trace of vegetation.

He threw back his head and sucked in great draughts of thin air. It was exhilarating, blood-warming, like a bowl of barley *chang*. It was the thing he liked best about his work—this intoxication of high places. It made up for the frostbite and the rope-burn and stoop-shoulders. It was the life.

Abruptly he stopped and glanced back. Scheer was on his heels, but the lama had disappeared.

The German's face was stern. "I don't like it," he said. "The old guy may have turned back."

"He didn't turn back," Passang said. He cupped his hands in a hail. There was no response from the storm. They waited several minutes more but still the monk didn't come.

"I'll stop him," Scheer said finally.

They followed their tracks down the slope. There, at the foot, they found him. He was crouched in the shelter of a bank, mumbling his *Om mani padme hum's* to a whirling prayer wheel.

He was unaware of their presence until Passang touched his elbow. Even then he finished his devotions before looking up. "I have delayed you," he said.

As Passang bent low he heard the lama's gasping wheeze, and his irritation returned. He was angry with the lama, with Scheer, but especially with himself. Angry that he should be in such a fix.

Scheer's big hands clenched red. "Tell him not to fall behind again," he ordered. "It's getting late."

Passang uncoiled his rope and looped it around the monk's waist. One end he tied to the German, and the other to himself, so that they were separated by forty feet of manila and the monk in the middle. He had two of everything: cramp irons, snow goggles, double gloves—only enough for himself and Scheer.

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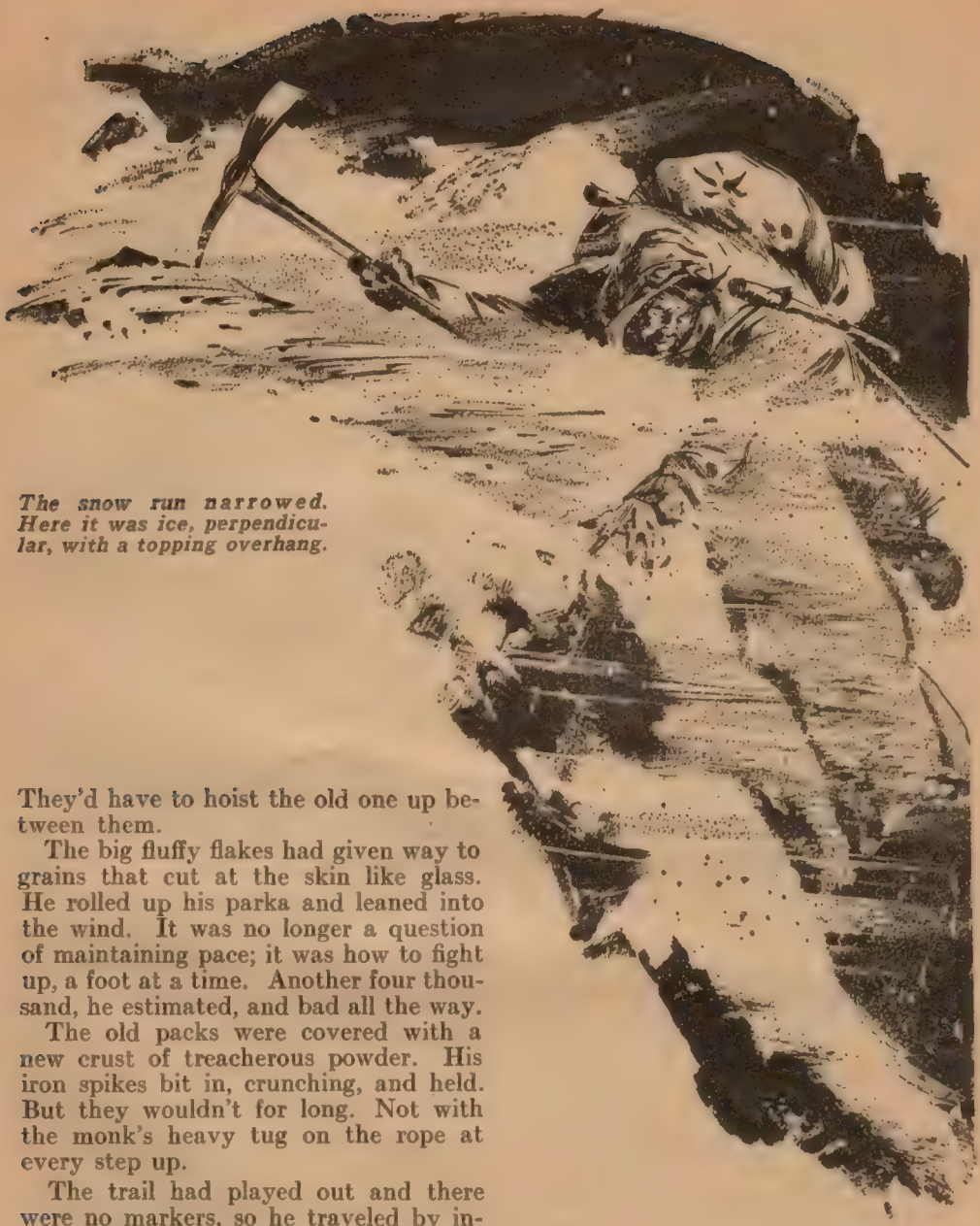


The snow run narrowed. Here it was ice, perpendicular, with a topping overhang.

They'd have to hoist the old one up between them.

The big fluffy flakes had given way to grains that cut at the skin like glass. He rolled up his parka and leaned into the wind. It was no longer a question of maintaining pace; it was how to fight up, a foot at a time. Another four thousand, he estimated, and bad all the way.

The old packs were covered with a new crust of treacherous powder. His iron spikes bit in, crunching, and held. But they wouldn't for long. Not with the monk's heavy tug on the rope at every step up.

The trail had played out and there were no markers, so he traveled by instinct. They left the safety of granite to cross an ice field. Blue cracks yawned its length, and they lost another hour of precious daylight working around. It was slippery, tricky work where one wrong guess would plunge them all in a crevasse.

They emerged on the far side into a terrific blast of wind, and he called a halt for bearings. A snow run tilted up out of sight at a seventy-five degree angle. Below it dropped away sheer in the murk. They had made the northeast ridge, with a straight shot at the crest.

It was the most exposed route, the shortest, and the riskiest. As far as he knew, no one had done it before. But if they made the top at all this was their only chance.

A sharp jerk yanked his feet from under. Flailing wildly, he jabbed with the harpoon of his stock. The prong caught in a layer of soft stuff that gave way. The jerk had become an irresistible drag, pulling him down. He and the lama slid with gathering momentum for the drop.

The line snapped taut around his stomach. He stopped short, abruptly as he began, feet above empty space. Farther above he made out the monk, half buried in snow, and above that, Scheer, braced against his stock handle. The German had taken two quick turns with the rope and snubbed them up.

Passang climbed to where the old man lay face up, panting hard. His complexion was yellow, the sacred color, and his eyes were closed. "Go ahead," he said weakly. "Don't wait for me."

Scheer was beckoning and shouting: "Come on! Hurry up!"

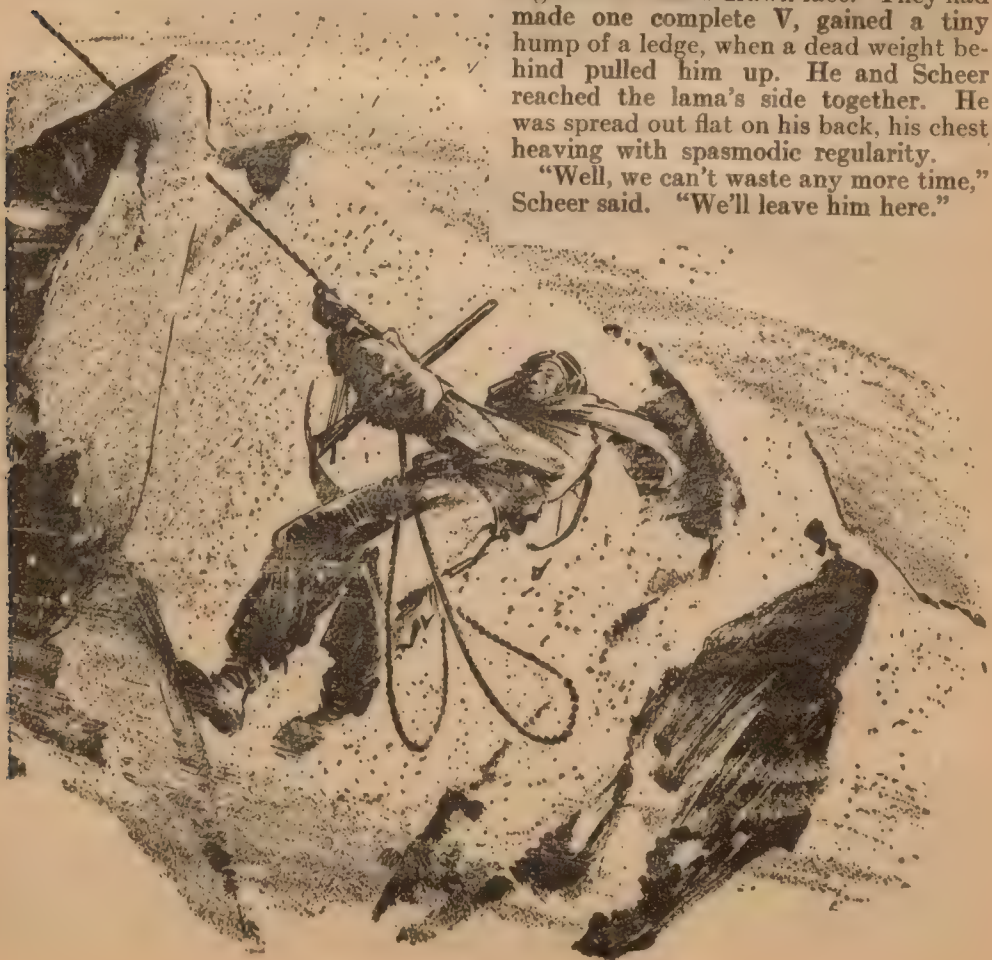
"It is better that a pilgrimage be made alone, with hardship and humility," the lama said. "It is written in the scriptures."

Passang knelt down, grunting, and lifted him by the armpits. "We're all pilgrims of a sort, old one," he said. "All three of us. But we'll do better staying together."

Scheer was silent when they floundered up to where he waited. He was studying his watch.

PASSANG began zig-zagging up the run, digging in to make holes for the lama's useless boots. He climbed slowly, more slowly than necessary, remembering the old man's drawn face. They had made one complete V, gained a tiny hump of a ledge, when a dead weight behind pulled him up. He and Scheer reached the lama's side together. He was spread out flat on his back, his chest heaving with spasmodic regularity.

"Well, we can't waste any more time," Scheer said. "We'll leave him here."



"He can't get back by himself now," Passang objected.

"No," the German said. "He can't get back."

"And no man can make the northeast ridge alone. Not even a strong seasoned climber."

Scheer said: "I'm going over the top tonight."

"Not even you." Passang debated what more he could say to make the German understand. He felt in an obscure way that his name might help. It was a name an English party had given him years ago—Passang, the Sherpa word for Friday. It had been a joke then.

In English, they'd told him, Friday meant a man who was loyal and faithful. Friday meant a good guide.

But because he had no gift for words he kept quiet. Maybe it was still a joke. He looked closely at the lama, and saw that he was oblivious to the situation. The old one was almost smiling.

There was a crack, and the monk's expression froze. A splotch of deep crimson, the color of his robes, began to spread. His chest stopped heaving. Then he stretched out, relaxed as though in sleep.

Passang hadn't known about the gun, but he was not surprised. The German would have foreseen this emergency too, and prepared for it.

"Will you take me up now?" Scheer demanded. "Or do I have to kill you too?"

He met Scheer's calm stare for a long second. The two of them seemed shut in a blinding, suffocating cocoon, separated only by the width of a man's body. "Killing me won't help you," he said. "Without me you'll fall, or lose the way and freeze."

Scheer held the automatic on him. His face was set, like a devil mask, but he showed no fear. "I'll give you one minute to make up your mind."

Passang turned away and coiled slack. If they made Chedo La the rest would be easy. The south side was sheltered and less steep. Even the old man might have made it from there down to Garmandu.

"You see this knife," he told Scheer, patting a scabbard at his belt. "My people call it a *kukri*. We have a custom that when a man pulls it out he can't put it back without first drawing blood."

"Is that a threat?"

"No," Passang said. "You have a gun. You can shoot me in the back anytime you want. But I have a *kukri*. I can cut you loose on the rope. Remember that when we're climbing."

The German rubbed a glove across his forehead. He slipped the automatic in an outside pocket, and left the flap unfastened. "I'll remember," he said.

Three thousand more, Passang thought. He was tired, now, but so was the German. His legs tightened with every move forward and up. He climbed fast, kicking out a crystalline spray. Not too fast, not careless, but a steady grinding gait that pumped out his last reserves.

It would take a good man to keep up. A damn good man, as the English put it.

The snow run narrowed. At the top it pinched into a rock chimney. Here it was ice, perpendicular, with a topping overhang. With numbed blue hands Passang unstrapped his axe.

He chopped out a handhold, then a foothold, and moved up. Scheer moved into the ones he vacated. It became mechanical after a while, worming along inches at a time, while the gale ripped and clawed. He concentrated on the job before him, forcing himself not to think of the German. That would come soon enough.

He paid out more rope while Scheer waited, and negotiated the overhang. Then he hoisted him up. "No rest," Passang said, and led off again.

He said that often during the next few hours—"No rest!" He used everything he knew on the northeast ridge, every technique, until they were a jumble in his head. After that he climbed like an animal, on his muscles and nerves and endurance.

High on the shoulder they reached an impasse. To the right was more vertical ice; to the left a slick rock face. Passang chose the face. How far across he didn't know.

He edged out, feeling for grips. The first crevice walled in. He came back

and tried another higher up. Tiny cracks, fingerholds, toeholds. One after the other he tested them, with his body glued above space. He could look down, straight down, a mile or two.

Once he looked back. The German was just behind. His face, pressed against rock, was dripping, either with melted snow or sweat. One hand gripped the rope and the other was jammed in his outside pocket. But it was the only time Passang did look back.

THE gray of the sky was turning sullen black when he stumbled over a pile of stones in a depression. Over his head a tattered prayer flag fluttered from the tip of a pole. A warm breath surged in—a breath of plains country and jungle.

Imperceptibly it broke over him that this was Chedo La. He was on top at last!

A wrench on the rope spun him half around. Scheer was coming over the crest, hauling himself along on his knees. When he saw the mound he stopped.

The blue eyes were bloodshot now, but there was no mistaking the look in them. Passang had never seen it before, but he knew. He knew, because in four days it was the first emotion the German had shown.

Scheer's right hand lifted leadenly with the automatic as Passang moved toward him. Trembling, he fired a wild burst, and still Passang came on, untouched. He raised up, hurled the empty gun at him, and then fell back in exhaustion.

Later, Passang cleaned the blade of his *kukri* in snow and replaced it in the scabbard.

He stared at the body, engulfed in a sense of personal loss. The German was a good mountaineer, an expert, perhaps the best he'd ever meet. The trouble was—Scheer had no feeling, for mountains or anything else.

For an instant he paused under the prayer flag before starting down to Garmandu. He placed a single stone on the pile. That was the least an Everest Tiger could do.

COME ON AND FIGHT!

By

LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

IT WAS his first winter in Alaska and during those dreary months when the sun made its miserly little arc over the southern horizon Fred Meade had sworn he would never spend another winter here. Anything but this eternal snow and ice and bitter cold; anything but this breathless, brooding silence. And yet he knew in his heart that he would have stayed here as long as Brad Pace needed him and would let him stay.

Of Brad Pace they said there was no

Fred took out the chunk of metal he'd found in the stove ashes and broke off a small piece. "Chew on that!" he ordered, tossing it at Birdy.

ILLUSTRATED
BY
HAMILTON GREENE

man who could carry such a load of liquor without showing it, there was no man so wild at gambling and there was no better man in the cockpit of an airplane.

But something had happened to Pace. He had spent a small fortune, buried it in the Breakheart district. And his luck was gone.

Meade finished his breakfast and went hobbling about the cabin, washing the dishes, setting things to rights. He moved as quietly as possible, though he doubted if anything short of an earthquake could awaken Brad Pace. Young Meade would have liked to think of himself as Brad's partner. In reality he was only flying for him. Brad had made that plain enough on one occasion that Meade wouldn't forget in a hurry.

Pace lay on the bunk across from Fred's, in the end of the cabin that they had curtained off for a bedroom. He lay on his side, breathing heavily, filling the small room with the odor of whiskey. The skin on the left side of his face had been broken open over the cheekbone, with an ugly bruise extending upward from the jaw.

Fred stood looking down at the older man and in spite of his twenty-six years he felt like a small boy, about to choke up and cry. He remembered the first flight he had made with Pace, his break-in flight over the territory covered by the air freight line. They had been caught in one of the sudden, unpredictable fall blizzards.

Meade had been sure their goose was cooked. The single-engined Beechter was plunging like a maddened horse in the choppy gale; snow so thick they could see no farther than the engine cowling. And yet Brad Pace was grinning and even at a time like that he could spare a moment to reassure the green pilot.

"Bring up your heavy artillery, kid," he shouted at Fred. "Learn to like a good fight."

Fred had never been in anything as bad as that since, but he had pushed the old Beechter into some pretty tough weather. And he had tried to learn how to relax; he had tried to learn to like a good fight.

BRAD PACE stirred under the blankets, turning onto his left side, his right hand falling over the edge of the bunk. The hand was swollen and discolored, the knuckles lacerated. Whatever had happened last night, Fred knew that Bradford Pace had given a good accounting of himself.

Fred kicked off his house moccasins, slipped into his mukluks and light parka. He stood by the table, reading the note Brad had left for him, though he already knew it by heart.

"I'm all washed up, kid," the note said. "No dust in the poke, but the old Beechter is yours for your flying pay. Take it, and I don't mean maybe. Remember she'll wing-flutter on you in a dive at anything above 250, but otherwise a sound ship. Fly that medicine out

to Red Southerland and if necessary fly him into Fairbanks to the hospital. Then keep on flying, kid. I mean that. Maybe you can sell the Beechter for enough to get your leg fixed. So long, kid—and remember, I don't want to see you again."

The note was unsigned. It must have caused Brad a tremendous effort of concentration to write with that battered hand, but you would never know it from the bold, hard strokes of the pencil. Nor would anybody guess that he had been wild drunk when he wrote it. The last sentence was what broke Fred's heart. He knew that he would have to leave without even telling Brad goodbye.

Outside the cabin it was warm and the path trench they had kept clear during the winter showed a brown ribbon of earth at its bottom, leading down to the flying field. Water ran in steady streams from the icicles that fringed the eaves.

Meade closed the door and, before remembering, slipped the padlock into the hasp ring and snapped it. A week or so before, their cabin had been ransacked. Brad had lost a pair of Transport goggles, his Savage rifle and some other things. Jim Helppi, deputy marshal at Chighi, thought it must have been Indians because of the many valueless articles taken; a dollar alarm clock and other things like that. But they had stolen the wolverine-lined helmet that Brad had given Fred, and that was something hard to forget.

Fred unlocked the door. No Indian would dare to enter while Brad was there, drunk or sober.

He stood before the entrance, looking up at the skim-milk sky. Yesterday it had been a fine azure, the sun blazing down with an almost tropical heat. Some of the old-timers, loafing on the porch of the Chighi trading post, had predicted the snow would be off in a few days, except for the drifts. "Another week an' the daisies'll be poppin' up, hittin' you under the chin," Glen Rouse assured Fred and immediately had an argument on his hand. "One more blizzard," Old Man Throm predicted, voice squeaky in his tobacco-stained beard.

Old Man Throm ought to know. He'd been here long enough. Nevertheless, Fred went back into the cabin and changed his warm caribou mukluks for boots and rubberized arctics.

DOWN at the airfield Sam Birdy, with one of Rader's half-breeds and some Indians to help, had shoved the two-engined Klim from Rader's end of the hangar.

Fred couldn't look at the lacquered beauty of that low-winged monoplane without feeling a hot, vengeful anger. Half of that plane had belonged to Brad Pace before he quarreled with George Rader and split their partnership.

Those were things that had happened before Fred's time. He had never learned why Brad had gone into partnership with a scheming, Jap-livered weasel like Rader, though it was easy enough to understand his reasons for ending the partnership.

George Rader was a pair with Toothy Morrison, his partner in the trading post. The other partner, Shorty Wickam, didn't count one way or another. Originally Shorty had owned the Chighi post. But he was too weak in character, too trusting and good-natured. It wouldn't be long before he would be merely a clerk for the other two. Rader and Morrison were both experts at the old game of freeze-out.

"Hi, there, Fred," Sam Birdy called. "How'd you like to fly a real ship?" Sam, scrawny and freckle-faced, was like some mongrel dogs. He was anybody's friend or if they were down in luck, their enemy.

Fred glanced at the wheels of the ship, grooved into the soft snow. There was ski gear for the plane, but Rader had never used it. "Don't tell me your boss is getting up nerve enough to fly," Meade said scornfully.

Sam grinned, knowing how careful Rader was about getting caught out in bad weather. When Brad Pace broke up the partnership it had been Rader's plan to start a competing operation. That was why he had insisted on getting full ownership of the Klim. But the first snow squall he ran into had changed his mind. After the one bad scare he had figured out a better way of ruining Pace.

"You better be changin' over to wheel gear," Sam advised Meade. "You never seen spring come in Alaska. One day it's winter, the next day summer."

"Maybe I'll change over, after this trip," Fred agreed.

He said it carelessly but suddenly it came to his mind that this would be his last trip. Brad's note had said, "Fly Red Southerland into a Fairbanks hospital. Then keep on flying." And Brad had meant just that.

Fred turned away suddenly, not wanting Birdy to see his face. He looked up at the steep slope of the corrugated hangar roof, remembering how he and Brad had worked all one night to shore it against the crushing weight of a heavy snow that had been too moist to slide off.

Old Charley, brother to Red Southerland's Aleut Indian, had taken the fire pot outside to heat up Fred's crankcase oil. He worked with that doddering aimlessness of his kind that in the past had so annoyed Meade. With old Charley there was always a tomorrow, reserved for the unpleasant tasks of life.

But now Fred was seeing him for the first time as a human being. He was seeing and remembering other things and to his surprise he realized that it was the bitter and hard experiences of Alaska that now seemed the ones worth remembering.

The time he had almost frozen to death, within two miles of Hollis Greer's claim; the time he got his airplane skis frozen and worked for hours in thirty below weather to chop them from the slush ice that had turned to steel. . . .

Fred Meade knew suddenly that when he left here he would be leaving a chunk of himself in Alaska.

He spoke to Charley, humped over the oil can, pretending industry. "Let's get her started."

Charley grunted, testing the can. "Too cold," he said. Anything to delay the need of work.

"Give me a hand on the doors," Fred ordered, returning the other's snag-toothed smile. Another time he would have been calling Charley names.

THEY had the doors opened when Jim Helppi came. The deputy U. S. marshal was of Finnish ancestry, a short, blocky man, hard as nails and stubborn in his opinions, but as fairminded as any man if he was treated fairly.

"Hello, Fred," Helppi greeted and there was something in his voice that warned Meade, made him turn with a quick tightening of his throat muscles. "Where's Brad?" Helppi asked.

"What's happened?" Fred wanted to know.

Jim Helppi looked him over. "What makes you think something's happened?"

Fred took a deep breath and stood stonily facing the marshal in stubborn silence.

Helppi's eyes were pale blue ice. "Toothy Morrison was killed last night, Fred," he said in a gentle voice. "Where's Brad?"

There was no use lying. That wouldn't stop Jim Helppi. "Brad's up at the cabin," Fred told him. "He—I thought

NO FINER DRINK...At home or on the go

". . . Brad gave Toothy Morrison a beer-and-spittoon shampoo."

I'd just let him sleep in this morning."

"Yup. A man would need sleep, after a couple of quarts, and a night like Pace had."

"Aw, what the hell, Jim!" Fred tried to make his laugh sound easy. "You know Brad's been saving up a thirst for a year or more. You surely don't imagine that it was him who killed Morrison!"

Helppi pushed tobacco into his long, curve-stemmed pipe. "You think a lot of Bradford Pace, don't you?" he asked, spacing the words between puffing to get the tobacco lighted.

"You damned well know it," Fred said. "How was Toothy killed?"

"Shot."

Fred let out a shaky breath of relief. Brad might kill the ratty little Morrison with his bare fists. But not with a gun; not even if Morrison had drawn on him. He'd take the gun from the other and ram it down Morrison's filthy gullet.

Helppi saw Fred's relief and understood the reason. He shook his head slowly. "Brad went crazy last night, Fred. You know what's been happening here?"

"About the Breakheart accounts? Rader's been keepin' those miners in his debt, like they used to do with Mexican peons. Overcharging them, holding back supplies they need, so that every summer cleanup barely clears them and they have to go into debt for the next winter."

Jim smiled coldly. "Already tryin' to build up a case for Brad, huh?"

"Well, it's the truth."

"It's the truth, too, that Pace is broke. Stone broke. You two've been flyin' supplies into Breakheart district from Fairbanks. Who do you think paid for those supplies, Fred?"

"Well," Fred said, wondering why he had never thought of this, "we keep an account book in the plane. The boys always sign up for—"

"The hell with accounts!" Jim broke in savagely. "You think those Fairbanks merchants are fools enough to underwrite hungry ground like this? It was Brad Pace who dug up the money, long as it lasted. Rader and Morrison shut down on credit, to freeze Pace out. And Pace wouldn't buy from 'em cash, because of their cut-throat prices."

Still Fred wasn't worried. "So Brad took their joint apart last night, eh?"

Jim nodded, the corners of his mouth twitching the least bit. "And a damned thorough job he did of it. Rader wasn't there. But Brad gave Toothy Morrison a beer-and-spittoon shampoo. Had the little skunk squealing bloody murder. Then some of Rader's men came in and . . . well, I understand there was quite a fight."

FRED felt his respect for Jim Helppi ebbing. "So that makes Brad a murderer?"

Jim shook his head. "No. I'm sorry, kid. Two other things. Brad got the worst of that fight, all the boys say. And as he pulled freight they heard him threaten that 'he was going to bring up his heavy artillery.' Those were his words."

Fred laughed. "Why, I've heard Brad say the same thing a hundred times! Just means he's goin' to tighten his belt for more fighting. What he meant last night was that he'd come back when he was sober and able to take on the whole bunch of them, single handed."

Helppi nodded, as though that same thing was in his own mind. He reached into his pocket. "What would you say that was?" he asked.

Fred examined the leaden slug that Jim held out between finger and thumb. "That's . . . well, it's a forty-five caliber bullet, isn't it? Been fired into something."

"Into Toothy Morrison's throat. But it's not a forty-five, son. It's from one of those old, single-action forty-fours. And I'm afraid it's from the same piece that Brad won from me in a poker game, five years ago when he was flying on the coast."

Fred had that same feeling of unreality that had gripped him when he first heard of the Japs bombing Pearl Harbor. This was a thing brewed by the devil, in the lowest, most stinking corner of hell. And yet if it wasn't true Jim Helppi wouldn't be telling him. But why, after all, had Jim spent this time discussing the matter? Jim didn't do things without reason.

Fred cleared his throat to ease the tightness. "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

Jim said, "I want you to say nothing of this to Brad or any other person. I'm the only one who even suspects Brad. Now you don't think Brad did it, do you Fred?"

Meade shook his head slowly. "I wouldn't believe it—not even if I saw it with my own eyes. Drunk or sober, Brad Pace wouldn't murder a man. Even a rat like Morrison."

Helppi nodded. "I feel the same way, Fred. Inside me. But when I took office I swore an oath that doesn't leave any room for my own feelings."

"What do you want?" Fred repeated.

"I want you to go up and get that forty-four of Brad's, without him knowing. With an old barrel like that I won't need any special apparatus to make a comparison test. A prospector's magnifying glass will do the trick. D'you get my idea?"

Fred got the idea, all right, and felt a warmth of gratitude to this stocky little Finn. Brad would be cleared and nobody would even know that he had been suspected.

Afterwards he was to wonder at himself for being so sure. He didn't find the old gun. Nor, later, could Jim Helppi find it. And Brad Pace, with the sullenness of a hangover, refused to answer a single question, refused to recognize anybody as a friend and cursed Fred, with the bitterness of shame, for not having obeyed his orders and flown the medicine up to Red Southerland and then left the country.

CHAPTER II

ONE MORE BLIZZARD

ON THE way up to Southerland's Fred stopped off at Hollis Greer's claim with a case of dynamite and some half-inch-by-eight bolts Greer had ordered to rebuild his pressure box.

Fred watched the old man solemnly put his name against the charge in the account book. He knew these old sourdoughs, knew how childish and trusting they were. Many of them still considered George Rader their friend. Red Southerland was about the only one with gumption to know that before Brad Pace came, Rader had kept them in virtual slavery with his account system and his various tricks of delaying necessary supplies for their work, holding their summer takes down so that they never quite got out of his debt.

"A mite of luck this summer," Hollis Greer promised Meade, "an' you'll be tearin' that account of mine outa your book for good an' all, son. Takes a whale of a lot of equipment to proper mine these worked-over cricks. But she's there, Fred."

He pointed along the slope of the creek channel. "You can't see it with the snow on, Fred, but this here crick used to have its channel up there. I got it staked out and there's where I'm agoin' to clean up for my old age. Yes, sir. Jest as soon's I git a little money ahead for equipment."

For his old age! Hollis Greer was seventy-five if he was a day. But always in the background of their minds was that vague future when they would make the great cleanup. When that day came they'd wear the best clothes a tailor

could sew for them, they'd have a derby hat, they'd drink all the whiskey they wanted and eat some of that fancy lettuce from Central, the hot springs resort.

Fred was so deep in his own black misery he had scarcely noticed the singular change that had come over the sky. As he walked back to the strip of level bench land used for an airfield, a half-mile from Greer's claim, he felt something strike his bare forehead.

The weather was so unseasonably warm that he had left his mittens in the airplane cabin. He reached up to touch the cool spot on his sweaty forehead. As he did so he saw a large drop of water strike his hand, then another and suddenly he was staring into a wall of heavy, sheeting rain.

He stood still in amazement. He had forgotten what rain was like, had forgotten that anything other than snow or sleet could fall from the heavens. Looking up he saw that the sky had changed from pale blue to an ugly gray that filled it to the exclusion of all else. All about him seemed packed with that gray, greasy color, like dirty wool, except that there was no form to it, no sense of cloud layers.

He heard Greer calling to him. But there was no time to waste. The ship was on ski gear and if this warm rain lasted any time at all there wouldn't be snow left for his takeoff.

In the air, making a low, shallow-banked turn over Hollis Greer's cabin, he saw the old man hopping about in excitement, waving his arms.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started. That all-pervading grayness began bleaching to white. Meade flew on for another fifteen minutes before he realized what had happened.

He hadn't flown into the storm. It had been forming over the region all day, marshaling its stealthy forces, waiting for the first break in the warm earth-layer of moist air.

THE Hornet engine growled deep in its brazen chest as the first violence of convection current caught the plane. Fred's eyes glued with unbelief to the racing hundred-hand of the sensitive altimeter. He was lifted two thousand feet in the time it took him to throttle the racing engine.

The plane hung, shivering as though with fright. A tremendous, irresistible weight slapped down on it. Invisible though it was, Meade had a feeling of ruthlessness in the force that threw him tight against his safety belt. There was a malignancy to the storm that was almost human.

With throttle wide open he managed to level the Beechter out a scant fifty feet above the wind-lashed tops of spruce trees. And then the snow struck.

The first flakes seemed as large as his hand, driving straight at his windshield with hurricane force. Almost immediately they turned into the fine dust of blizzard snow.

He held the plunging ship just a few feet above the level of scattered trees. The whole world seemed in chaos. The plane whipped up onto its side and plunged.

He had the control wheel clear over to the right and back, and as much rudder as he dared without sideslipping into the ground that he could see flat below him out of the left window. The next instant he was over on his right side, frantically spinning the wheel to get his wing up.

Meade was conscious of both legs straight out and tight with all his strength against the rudders. He tried to slacken himself. His bad left leg, where the knee-cap had been split, was beginning to ache horribly.

In air as rough as this there was one thing he must do. Keep sight of the ground. He had blind-flying instruments, such as they were; a turn-bank, the magnetic compass and a rate-of-climb. But in a storm like this they would be almost useless.

There was no snow spume. That was one good thing. Wet down by yesterday's and today's warmth and by that heavy rain shower, the ground snow wouldn't be picked up and blown, to merge with the snow yet falling. He clung to the thought and to the hope that he might get over the ridge into Chighi drainage.

But when he got there, the ridge was covered. Snow or clouds, he couldn't tell which it was.

He approached the ridge with skis almost touching the snow. Ten feet higher and the ground would be blotted out.

At the last instant he jerked the plane around in a vertical. The bare rock teeth of the divide were curtained from him. They might be only a few feet higher or they might be a hundred feet and he would fly straight into them.

During this time he'd had the sense that behind him the weather was clearer, that there would be no difficulty in returning to the safety of Hollis Greer's field. He could hole up there with Greer and wait for the blizzard to spend itself.

It was a false promise of security. The storm was all about him and now he had to dive at a steep angle to stay with the mountain slope. The only way he knew of this dive was by his airspeed. All sense of level had disappeared. There was the white-sheathed ground below and the white storm above and that was all.

He was humped forward in the pilot seat, his eyes close to the side window, looking ahead with quick darting glances to catch the further slope before he ran into it. He knew it was getting unbearably cold in the ship's cabin. His hand reached down several times automatically to open the heater valve that was already wide open. Outside temperature must have dropped forty degrees in as many minutes.

FRED MEADE had had one crash since graduating from the flying cadet corps and taking his year of active training. He knew the feeling; that sudden, helpless knowledge that it was going to happen, then things closing in on you.

Ever since then he had had in the back of his mind an awareness that all veterans carry with them. The feeling that some tremendous, implacable force crouches, waiting with hungry hands. The hands close over their victim. And that is Death.

He had been flying a commercial plane when it happened. The engine conked on takeoff. When they dragged him out of the wreckage he was no longer fit material for the Army Air Force. He could still fly, but a man who limps isn't allowed the silver wings of an A..P. rating. Nor do the airlines have any use for him.

There were quacks who took his money for various electrical treatments and massages. They could cure him. Sure they could cure a little thing like a split knee-cap. But doubts grew in them as his money dwindled.

Finally, when it was too late, he learned the truth. An operation, a very delicate, expensive operation, and his leg would be as good as new, or he would walk stiff-legged the rest of his life.

He didn't mind gambling on the stiff leg. He had come to Alaska to get the fifteen hundred dollars that would be needed.

The first violence of the storm, the vertical currents, were wearing in strength. But if anything the snow had increased. There was absolutely no horizon to study his natural sense of balance. Just the snow below, an occasional rock or clump of bush or a few scrubby trees. This was the north slope of ridge. On the other side the trees would be thicker.

Meade knew that it would be an accident if he ever found Greer's place. On the other hand, if he could have gotten over the divide, there would have been the forest patterns to locate and guide him.

He had two choices. He could make a crash landing near some of the stunted trees with the hope of digging into the snow and living until the storm was over and help came. Or he could turn back and fly blind over the divide.

The wise thing was to crash it where he could pick a fairly level, open spot. If he ever went blind in this storm the odds were heavy that he would see the ground only a split second before he struck head-on.

He throttled the big Hornet and in the sudden quiet that followed he heard Brad's voice, just as he had heard it on that first flight. "*Learn to like a good fight, kid.*"

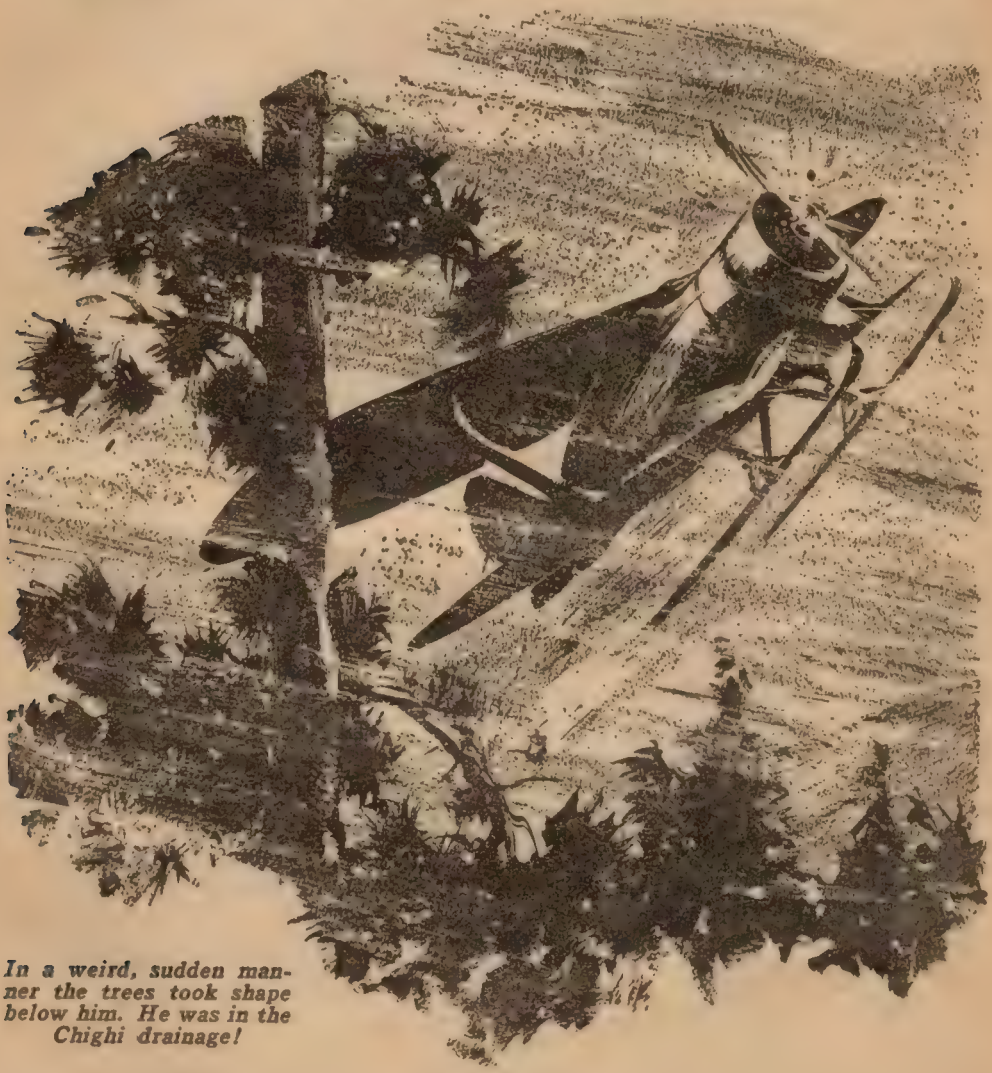
It was so real that Fred turned in his seat, momentarily convinced that Brad Pace was sitting there beside him, grin-

ning, sure of himself. "Hell!" he said, under his breath. "What would Brad think of me?" He twisted the wheel to the left, drawing it to him in a reckless vertical, catching the nose up expertly with the rudder.

The rate-of-climb needle jerked up and down over the five-hundred-foot-per-minute climb mark. Fred leveled his wings as the ground disappeared below him. He sat stiff and almost motionless, eyes held as though fascinated by the instruments.

He allowed himself a good thousand feet above the ridge level. The turn needle made quick little movements to right and left of the centerline. Meade couldn't hold it steady in the rough air. All he hoped was to divide the error.

Not knowing the wind velocity it was almost pure gamble how long he would be in crossing the ridge. He watched the sweep second hand of his instrument clock jerk around the dial. Its slow travel fascinated his mind. He was making the startling discovery that other men had made before him. Time was an abstraction, an illusion of the mind, an absolute nothing except as related to other things.

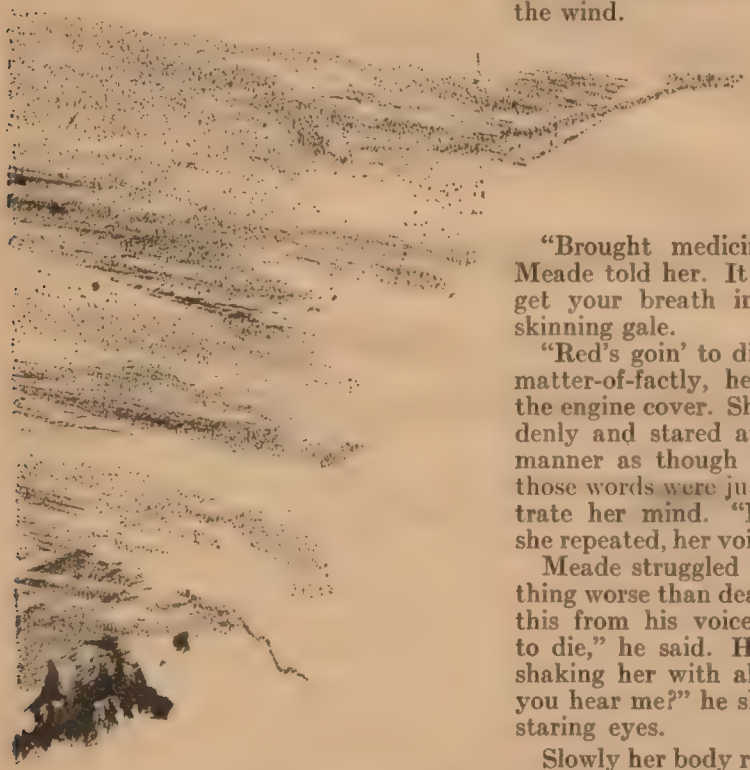


In a weird, sudden manner the trees took shape below him. He was in the Chighi drainage!

He had already closed the engine shutters. He put the hotspot full on to the carburetor. By a tremendous effort of will power he forced himself to drag back on the throttle.

With engine grumbling at idle, he sank down into the white void.

The big hand of the altimeter moved slowly around its dial, the little hand



clocking off the thousand feet of descent. He was below the ridge level now. Fear grew in him slowly that he had held off too long and would crash into the opposite slope of the narrow valley.

In a weird, sudden manner the trees took shape below him. He was in the Chighi drainage!

RED SOUTHERLAND'S wife heard the sound of Meade's engine. A big, rawboned, untidy person, she was out on the sandbar to help the flyer within twenty minutes of his skis' touching the rough snow.

Fred had always looked askance at Southerland's wife, never quite accepting her as a woman. She dipped snuff and swore with the wholehearted violence of a mule skinner. She was the exact antithesis of what he considered proper in the opposite sex.

"What in hell you doin' out in this kinda weather?" she shouted, the first words she spoke after their struggle in getting the plane snugged down, tail to the wind.

"Brought medicine . . . for Red," Meade told her. It was a fight even to get your breath in the driving, face-skinning gale.

"Red's goin' to die," the woman said, matter-of-factly, helping Meade fasten the engine cover. She stopped work suddenly and stared at him in a horrified manner as though the full meaning of those words were just beginning to penetrate her mind. "Red's goin' to die!" she repeated, her voice rising to a scream.

Meade struggled with a fear of something worse than death. He tried to keep this from his voice. "Red's not going to die," he said. He gripped her arms, shaking her with all his strength. "Do you hear me?" he shouted at her blank, staring eyes.

Slowly her body relaxed and sanity returned to her. "Tell me what you need done," she said quietly.

But when he reached the cabin Fred knew that it would be a miracle if Red Southerland lived through the night. The air struck him in a fetid wave as he opened the door and he could hear the sick man's breathing rasp loud and tortured in the next room.

Little Claw, the Aleut, stood by the kitchen stove that glowed cherry red in the dim light. His squaw sat on a stool, rocking her body back and forth, her face expressionless.

Little Claw let out a howl of protest as Meade swung the door wide open and propped it. Red's wife looked at him as though he were crazy.

"We want fresh air in here," Meade said grimly. "There's not a cupful of oxygen in the whole dump. Pile all the covers you got onto him. Give me a piece of blanket cloth for his chest. You, Claw, get wood, plenty wood. Move, you blasted heathen!"

"Ain't much wood left," Mrs. Southerland told him. "Red's sorta ailin' with his lungs all winter. Got coal, though. Red found an outcrop of the stuff." Her voice sounded hopeless. "It ain't good coal. Takes wood to keep it burnin'."

Little Claw stood sullenly at the door, ostentatiously nursing his left hand that was shrunken and partly useless. Claw was a mean-tempered, worthless Indian and he used his deformity as an excuse for his laziness.

Fred reached toward his hip, as though there was a gun in his pocket. "You go get wood," he threatened. "You not come back . . . you not get grub . . . unless you bring wood."

Fred helped him out of the door with a solid kick and when he turned back into the cabin he saw that Claw's woman was smiling with secret approval. He remembered that last summer, in town, Brad Pace had thrown Claw into the Chighi River for beating his wife.

CHAPTER III

THE SILVER LINING

SOUTHERLAND was a huge, redheaded, redbearded ape of a man with a tremendous store of vitality. By four o'clock the next morning his breathing had eased a little. The crisis was past.

Meade kept hot packs of medicated oil on his chest, changing them every ten minutes and leaving the door open enough so that there was always fresh air in the cabin. He made Claw and his wife go out to their own lean-to hut, and finally persuaded Mrs. Southerland that she must get sleep.

The wind kept up and Fred knew they were in for one of the three-day blizzards. Old Man Throm had been right when he said there would be one more storm before the spring breakup.

Mrs. Southerland woke about noon. By this time Red's breathing was almost normal and Fred was glad to have her take over so that he could get some rest.

He slept, fully dressed, in a spare bunk in the kitchen and when he woke up, still bemused by heavy sleep, he wondered vaguely where he was and who the woman was, sitting at the kitchen table with a sewing basket on the floor by her chair.

It was Red Southerland's wife, of course. That knowledge seeped into his brain when she stood up to a shelf, slatternly and grotesque in the lamplight, and dipped her chewing stick into a snuff box and tucked it to a comfortable spot in her cheek.

And then he saw that she had his flying helmet and was measuring it to a piece of heavy wrapping paper, cutting the paper as though to make a pattern. Instead of scissors she used a hunting knife and when she put the knife on the table he saw that the handle was of walrŭs ivory, carved as a totem pole and stained with vivid blues and reds.

"What are you doing, Mrs. Southerland?" Fred asked curiously. In speaking he came fully awake.

He had surprised her and her confusion was evident when she turned, making a futile attempt to conceal his helmet.

"What're you doing?" he repeated sharply, swinging out of the bunk.

"Damnation!" she exclaimed in annoyance. "I mighta knowed you'd catch me."

"What is it?"

Her lips were working nervously and Fred saw that she had taken out her false teeth for comfort. "I'm amakin' you another helmet, just like that one you got stole. With a wolverine linin', too." She spoke in defiance, almost as though angry with him. "Like that one Brad give you."

Fred sat down on the bunk, remembering suddenly about Brad Pace who was being held in the Chighi skookum-house for the murder of Toothy Morrison. He had been so busy during the last twenty-four hours that he had had little time to think about his own troubles.

Mrs. Southerland was matching her pattern to one of the triangular segments

of the helmet, trimming it to fit with the knife, covering that embarrassment she had in being caught at such feminine work.

"But—why should you make me a helmet?" Fred asked.

"Why shouldn't I?" she snapped. "Ain't a body got a right to suit their pleasures once an' a while?" She turned her back to him, bending low over the work. Fred saw that she was crying and her voice was shaky when, after a long interval, she spoke. "Red's goin' to live," she said. "I got you to thank for it, son."

Fred Meade understood then why she was making him a helmet. He went hastily into the bedroom to see how Red was getting along and when he came back he made a big fuss at heating up some beans and sowbelly. He ate his breakfast on the table opposite from Mrs. Southerland. "Nice looking knife," he said, trying to get back to commonplace things.

"Red got it on the coast," the woman told him. "I traded it to Elsie for this wolverine pelt an' some other . . . she's always had an eye for it, poor kid."

Fred balanced the knife in his hand with appreciation, examining the carving. It was the sort of thing that a man wanted, the minute he laid eyes on it. He knew better than argue with Mrs. Southerland about parting with the knife. "Elsie . . . she's Little Claw's wife?" he asked.

"Yeah. Poor girl. If it wasn't for her I'da kicked that worthless fish-eater out a long time ago."

"D'you suppose Elsie would sell the knife?"

MRS. SOUTHERLAND looked up, shaking her head decidedly. "Not for a handful of nuggets." She smiled. "But next trip you bring a couple yard of red'n-yellow calico. She'll trade it for that."

"What do you think I am?" Fred asked heatedly, taking up a forkful of beans.

"Well, why not? She'll trade it to George Rader for less, next time she gets to the post. He's seen it an' wants it. Tried to steal it from Red."

Suddenly the room appeared brighter to Fred Meade. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed, shoving the tin plate of food aside, staring at Mrs. Southerland.

"What's a matter with you, youngster?"

"You mean, he actually tried to steal the knife?"

"Say, there ain't no bigger sneak thief north of Ketchikan than that George Rader. One way or another, he'll steal you deaf'n blind."

Fred sat quiet for a long time, his thoughts arranging themselves. He felt Mrs. Southerland's eyes questioning him. He said, "Brad Pace is in jail for murdering Toothy Morrison. And it was George Rader who did it!"

"What!"

Fred Meade bent over the table toward her. He had the totem knife in his hand and in his excitement was pointing it as though to stab. He told her the story from beginning to end, even told of their cabin being ransacked, a thing that she already knew.

"Maybe he didn't plan the murder. Maybe he was just passing by our cabin, found it unlocked and couldn't resist the impulse of stealing things. I know how those sneak-thieves are."

Mrs. Southerland had stopped her work. "An' he took Brad's forty-four!"

"Sure. I don't know whether Brad even missed it at the time. Anyway, he didn't mention its being gone."

Mrs. Southerland reviewed all this and saw a flaw in his argument. "I ain't puttin' it past him, y'understand. Rader never had no love for Toothy, nor nobody else, for that matter. 'Cept himself. Only—why didn't he leave Brad's gun there for them to find? That woulda been sure evidence."

Fred had to admit that. It was an accident Jim Helppi had found the bullet in such a condition it could be so easily identified. And it was purely accident Helppi should be so familiar with the old gun.

He spoke slowly, thinking the thing out aloud, seeing the pictures of how it was. "Rader came back to the post, late that night or in the morning, after Brad an' Toothy had their set-to. All right. It happened in their office, in the back

room. Nobody there. Maybe Rader caught Toothy at the books, trying to double-cross him. Maybe at the safe . . . by gosh, I remember now! Helppi let me look in the office and the safe door *was* open."

"So they had a quarrel," Mrs. Southerland joined into reconstructing the crime.

"And Rader had that pistol with him —or had it hidden some place in the office. He shoots Morrison. You know, on impulse. He's not thinking anything about Brad—about implicating him in crime."

"But he will, now that Brad's in jail on suspicion. He'll try to use it, some way to cinch the thing."

"I just hope he does! See, Brad's in jail. He can't slip it into Brad's pockets, or anything like that. And Jim Helppi thoroughly searched our cabin. He knows darned well the gun wasn't there yesterday morning."

There was a long silence, both of them busy with their thoughts. "No," Mrs. Southerland said finally, "he won't do it. Rader's too smart for that."

MEADE felt the hopelessness coming back over him. "Yeah," he agreed, "yeah, I guess you're right." He got up and moved listlessly to the window. He used the knife to scrape an opening through the thick coating of ice and frost. "Still blowing," he muttered. "Not much snow."

"An' a couple days from now it'll be so hot. . . ." Mrs. Southerland's voice dwindled, as though she didn't care one way or another what happened. Then her voice picked up energy from a hidden source. "I want to get away from here. I hate it! What does summer mean to me? Daylight to dark, humpin' over that damn sluice, tryin' to keep that black gravel from chokin' the riffles."

"I know," Fred said kindly. "You and Red work like dogs and it's men like Rader who get the benefits. It's the same all over Breakheart district, Mrs. Southerland. God help you, now that Brad Pace is finished."

"What're you talkin' about! You're not givin' up that easy, Fred Meade. I've been watchin' you this winter. You've growed up, son—a whole lot different'n when you first come, snooty, high'n-mighty last fall."

Fred knew that he had changed. He had learned to enjoy a good fight, a clean fight. But this—there didn't seem any way he could fight. "I'll hang on," he promised. "One way or another, I'll hang on and do my best to clear Brad."

"A man can't dig forever without hittin' a pay streak," the woman promised. "Except here," she added bitterly.

"Red's claim all washed out?"

"No 'tain't. Red drifted into that high terrace gravel last summer an' got colors. Only it's 'shotty,' with a lotta 'flour,' an' that damned black gravel keeps chokin' our riffle blocks."

Fred turned from the window. He went back to finishing his breakfast. "Your assessment work up?" he asked, while Mrs. Southerland was washing his dishes and the skillet.

"Lord, no!" she said. "Red ain't even filed proof-of-labor for two years. Who'd want to jump claims on hungry ground like this?"

"What about that high bar gold?"

"Jest pockets, an' it'd take a forty-thousand-dollar dredge to work 'em proper. Son, this district was well named when they called it Breakheart."

Meade knew that what she said was the hard truth. The gold was too scattered to pay for proper equipment needed to work the gravel. He went over to poke up the fire and add more wood and some of the slaty coal. The bottom part of the stove was almost full of ashes and he made a mental note to clean it out as soon as the storm abated. "Where's Little Claw?" he asked.

"You won't find *him*, long's there's any work to do."

Fred looked about the primitive cabin with that feeling that an arctic storm gives to people; the feeling of being imprisoned in some cramped, underground dungeon. He didn't blame Mrs. Southerland for wanting to escape it. "We've got to keep this place warm," he said, "even if we have to burn up Red's flume for fuel." He started reluctantly drawing on his arctics, not relishing the idea of going out into the sub-zero weather.

"That's just exactly what we'll do," Mrs. Southerland told him, her voice hard with decision. "You know where the sluice box is, down back of the cabin. Chop it up, son." Her voice rose with savage anticipation. "That an' the riffle blocks. Then start on the flume. Maybe if we burn the whole shebang Red'll have sense enough to pull out, while we still got life in us."

Fred compromised on the riffle blocks and the next day, when these were burned, he followed the flume line and found an old abandoned section that was still up on its trestle work, so that it was dry and sound. He kept the fire raging in the stove and kept opening the door whenever the air got stale. On the third day, like clockwork, the storm was ended.

THAT morning it would have been hard to find a more enchanting place or a thing more weirdly beautiful than the sun, with sun-dogs on its circle and halos around the reflected suns. Fred knew that he would have to hurry and get his plane off the sandbar landing field, before the thin crust of snow melted, leaving patches of bare sand to trip his skis and nose him over.

He was cleaning out the stove, dumping the ashes a short way from the cabin when Mrs. Southerland came out to talk with him.

"It's pretty, ain't it?" she said wistfully, looking down toward the creek, where it joined the Chighi River. "You know, there ain't no prettier place than Alaska."

Fred hid his amusement, bending to examine some slag in the stove ashes. "I thought you hated Alaska."

"Sho-o-o, now!" she scolded. "You hadn't oughta recall what an old woman says, youngster." She drew in a deep breath of the warming air. "No," she reflected, "Alaska was made for us; Red an' me was made for Alaska. We—we'll just keep on agoin', long's there's life in us."

Fred had lifted the piece of slag, still warm from the stove. "That's funny," he said.

"What's funny about it?" Mrs. Southerland bristled. "Ain't a body got the right to choose their own dyin' place?"

"I mean this. Feel how heavy it is."

"It's that coal. More rock in it than coal. Red says it's—"

Fred had broken off a piece of the slag and was examining the edges. His voice had a note of repressed excitement. "Did you put anything in the stove?" he asked. "I mean—any kind of metal?"

"Why, not that—"

"I mean—well, a pewter candlestick or—" He had taken out his pocket knife to get a clean surface in the slag-like chunk. "Mrs. Southerland, did you or anybody else—could any of you have dropped a piece of silverware in the stove?"

She was down on her knees beside him, catching his excitement. "Don't be a fool! Candlesticks—all we got for 'em is whiskey bottles. Ain't a piece of real silverware in the cabin."

Meade stared at her. "That coal!" he said, his voice breathless. "Don't you see? The stove redhot, enough wood to make a coking fire—a smelting fire. Don't you see?"

"I—oh, my God, don't tell me it's—"

"Silver! Look at it! From that coal—from the rock in the coal." Fred was panting, as though from some heavy exertion. He saw Little Claw step from the lean-to, blinking against the sunlight.

The Aleut was staring at them with native curiosity. Suddenly Meade was afraid and with a stealthy hand thrust the piece of metal into his shirt front. "Keep still," he warned Mrs. Southerland. "Act as though—act natural, point at things and—"

"Silver! Why, that'd be lode silver, wouldn't it?" She spoke in a dry, harsh whisper.

Fred raised his voice. "Well, I'll have to be pulling out, Mrs. Southerland." In a careless manner he raked his boot over the ashes, covering them with moist snow. "There's a lot of *work* to do down at the ship."

He spoke loud enough for Claw to hear him. And he spoke with purpose. At the mention of work, Little Claw turned back hurriedly into the shed.

Fred guided Mrs. Southerland onto

the path leading toward the sandbar. "The thing is to get it staked out," he said, in a lowered voice. "You know where Red found the coal?"

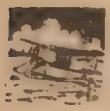
"Why, sure." She pointed. "Right up there where you see that black rock, shaped like a squirrel's head—about two miles. I've dug some of—"

"All right, then you must stake it out. You know how to stake out a mining claim?"

"Sure. Red just . . . well no, come to think I ain't quite—"

"Six hundred-and-sixty by twelve-twenty. I remember Greer telling me. Pace it off, long steps; count every time you put your left foot down, and multiply by five."

"Lord love me!" Mrs. Southerland shivered. "I got buck fever, son. What'll I put on the stakes?"



THEY were down to the plane. Fred had gotten out the account book and was making a hurried sketch of the creek, his fingers shaking so that he could hardly hold the pencil. "Keep your head," he advised sharply. "Be calm, Mrs. Southerland."

"But what'll I put on the stakes? Damnation! At a time like this Red's outa his head, mumblin' about churned buttermilk and sech."

Fred had torn blank sheets from the account book, was scribbling down names. "Stake out a claim for yourself and Red; cover the ledge where you dug up the last bunch of coal. Then keep on staking out claims—for Brad Pace and for me—and for every honest miner you know in this district. Cover that whole ledge."

"But what'll I—"

"Look! The important thing is proper description. Take all your measurements from that rock, describe it as 'Squirrel Head Rock' and use Red's compass; so many feet north, so many east—like that. Then just write out: 'This is notice that I, the undersigned, a citizen of the United States, claim this property . . .' and then describe it. Do you think you can do that?"

Mrs. Southerland had recovered from her first shock. "You jest bet your britches I can. An' you're goin' to record 'em, hey?"

"And I've got to get off this sandbar while there's still snow on it. And get into Fairbanks before the office closes. Then I'll fly back to Chighi and change over to wheel gear."

Mrs. Southerland clutched his arm. "How about Brad Pace?"

"Don't you understand! We'll be *rich*. We can hire the best lawyers in Seattle, in the whole U. S. We'll get detectives and criminal experts. Rader's dangling from a hangman's noose right—"

Suddenly, to Fred's dismay, Mrs. Southerland threw her arms around him. "Hallelujah!" she shouted, at the top of her voice, lifting him off the ground, whirling him in an Apache war dance. "Hallelujah, praise be!"

On the way into Fairbanks to record the claims young Meade kept feeling of his lower ribs. They might not be broken, but for sure they were badly bent. "What a woman!" he muttered.

Back at Chighi he faced the unpleasant prospect of making a crash landing. But in his present state of mind that was a mere nothing. Even if he completely washed out the old ship it wouldn't be more than three or four thousand dollars. Nothing at all to a rich man.

He knew positively that Mrs. Southerland would keep her promise to stake out the claims. She was that sort of person. And the claims were recorded. He had the receipts right in his pocket. There was no earthly chance of a slip-up. Not a chance!

CHAPTER IV

CRACKUP

IT WAS twilight when he circled over the Chighi field, examining the dark patches in the snow that he knew were bare ground. He came down low over the field, at near stalling speed, trying to figure some landing run that would keep him on snow until he had lost enough speed so he wouldn't nose over when the skis struck earth.

Sam Birdy, with his Indians and the two half-breeds, were pushing Rader's ship into the hangar. They stopped work to watch Meade. Old Charley was with them and Fred knew that it would never occur to the Aleut that he might spread some snow over the bare patches. Or some of the hay that they kept for that purpose in the tool shed.

There wasn't a breath of wind, not enough even to flutter the ragged end of the windsock.

Fred chose a diagonal strip, coming in over the river on his gun, holding the airspeed down till the old plane was shivering in a stall.

His skis slapped the snow. It was moist snow, with a lot of drag to it.

His speed diminished in a hurry. But not fast enough. The skis grated onto the bare, sandy earth. He felt the safety belt jerk tight against his stomach. The old ship bowed in a dignified manner and abruptly the propeller came to a stop as its tip dug in.

Birdy led the others, a wide grin on his hatchet face. "Too bad, kid," he shouted. His voice indicated that he didn't think it was bad at all.

Fred got out of the tilted plane. He was too much of a flyer not to feel the hurt that he had done the old ship. The tip of the metal propeller was bent; both skis had snapped off forward of the strut fittings.

"Get it up to the hangar, Charley," Fred ordered. "Hire these boys to help you. Pay 'em whatever they ask."

"Pay 'em with what?" Birdy demanded. Like all weak men he enjoyed his small triumphs. Fred Meade might be a pilot, but a pilot is less than nothing after a crackup.

Fred climbed back into the ship to get his account book and map folder.

"Pay 'em with what?" Birdy repeated, shouting the question.

Old Charley and the other Indians stood motionless, eyeing the ship with stolid faces.

"Didn't you hear me?" Fred demanded. "You'll get your pay. Ten dollars apiece—twenty dollars apiece, if you'll stay all night on the job."

"Listen to him!" Birdy chortled. "Hey, don't you know Brad Pace's in jail for murder! He's flat broke, too. George told me."

Meade whirled on him in fury. "You wedge-faced punk! You don't remember Brad puttin' up money for your wife's operation, do you?"

Birdy's smile faded as he backed up from Meade's threatening advance. "Hey!" he shouted in alarm as the flyer reached into his shirt front.

Fred took out the chunk of metal that he had found in the stove ashes and broke off a small piece. "Chew on that!" he ordered, tossing it at Birdy. "Tell that yellow-gutted boss of yours to chew on it. He'll get a bad case of silver poisoning, believe me."

"Silver!"

To these men it had almost the magic of the word *gold*.

"Yeah, silver. Lode silver. A whole sidehill ledge of it; probably half the mountain."

"Silver!" Birdy repeated in an awed whisper. Suddenly he was all over Meade with his friendliness, to hear the story—the Indians forming a close circle to listen.

"But the only trouble," Meade finished, watching the greed in Birdy's face, "is that Mrs. Southerland has staked out every inch of the hill. And I've got it recorded."

Sam Birdy looked as though he might burst into tears. "You mean—look now, Fred, you wouldn't treat an old friend—"

"I mean that you and George Rader and all the other bloodsuckers here in this stinkhole are plumb out of luck." Meade turned on old Charley and the others. "You fellas want twenty dollars apiece, for a night's work?"

Apparently they did.

Fred remained only long enough to get them started on the work.

AS HE walked the two miles into town Fred began to feel a reaction from his excitement. Long before he reached the corduroyed road that was the main street of Chighi, he knew that he had made a fool of himself.

What if they did have all the good ground staked out? Mrs. Southerland was there, practically alone, with Red

Southerland helpless, flat on his back. There would be a stampede, sure as fate, with all the lawlessness that goes with a stampede. Nobody was going to take his word for it that there were no more claims left.

Much subdued in spirit, he approached the frame building that had been a church before its pastor gave up the idea of saving the collective souls of the Breakheart district. Old Man Throm, the town constable and keeper of the Chighi skookumhouse, let him in to see Pace.

Brad Pace sat on an army cot. He had pulled a bench over beside the cot and was laying out cards for a game of solitaire. His face, black with whiskers, raised against the lamplight to stare at the young man. After a long pause he said, "Hello, kid."

"Hello, Brad," Fred said and tried to think what next to say. He had this tremendous news to impart, but he didn't want to blurt it out like a twelve-year-old.

Brad put the deck of cards aside. He spoke without looking up. "I'm sorry about that note, kid. A little bit drunk—a lot drunk—that night." He looked up and the uncertain way that he smiled hurt Fred. Brad was never the kind to be uncertain. "It was the whiskey—a man's a damned fool to drink so much. I don't even remember writing the note. You're not the kind to run out on a friend, and I didn't have any business ordering you to."

"That's all right, Brad."

Pace gathered up the cards he had spread and added them to the deck. "It's not all right," he denied. "That's the first time I ever got drunk enough so I couldn't remember things. But I didn't think I would kill a man, even—"

"You mean you actually shot Morrison!"

Brad's head turned slowly from side to side. "I don't know," he said in a low voice. "I don't know. But who else. . . ?"

"That gun was stolen from the cabin. Along with that other stuff."

Brad shook his head. He got up and walked to the window. "No," he said. "I'd put the gun in the ship, in that side pocket, back of the pilot's seat. I'd bought a box of shells in Fairbanks. Not for shooting Morrison," he added quickly, turning to face Meade.

"Of course not," Fred agreed.

"I had never fired the old gat. I thought I'd try it out."

"But that doesn't change anything, Brad! Rader could have swiped it from the ship, just as easily as the cabin."

"Rader! You've got it figured that George Rader killed Toothy?"

"Why not? He stood the most to gain by it—eliminating one of the partners. Maybe he didn't do it for just that reason, but the reason is there, just the same."

"Rader *couldn't* have done it, Fred. He didn't get back until long after Wickam found Toothy that morning, cold and stiff as a mackerel."

"Who said Rader didn't return until afterward?"

"They broke a sled runner, coming back empty from Rader's mine. Frank was with him all the . . ." Pace stopped. "Frank," he repeated thoughtfully.

"Yeah. For a quart of whiskey that half-breed would lie from hell to breakfast."

Pace came back to sit on the cot, his face thoughtful.

Rader could have returned any time, after the gang cleared out. Quarreled with Toothy and killed him. Maybe he did actually break a sled runner that night and came in with the dogs, leaving the sled. Well, there was his alibi, ready made. He just took Frank and went back; brought the sled in after he knew there had been plenty of time to discover the body."

"Funny. It never occurred—what put the idea into your head, kid?"

"Mrs. Southerland. He tried to steal a knife from Red."

"A knife? I don't get the connection."

"Maybe you've never known a sneak-thief; perhaps kleptomaniac is better. We had one of them in my flying class."

"Yeah?" Brad was still puzzled.

FRED sat down on the bench. The thing was clear enough to him but he had to convince the other. "This man in the cadet class," he said earnestly, "was well

on the way to getting A. P. wings and a commission, something most young men would give their necks for. Instead, he got 'benzened'—kicked out in disgrace. And for what? For stealing a two-dollar celluloid wind computer."

"That's damned hard to believe," Pace said.

"It's the truth. Brad, you haven't told anybody that you might have killed . . . without knowing?"

"Well . . . yes. Jim Helppi and I discussed it." Brad stood up again, his movement jerky. "If I was that kind of a guy, Fred, I—well, I belonged on the end of a rope."

Meade said, his voice hard, "Of all the damned fools!"

Brad was absent-mindedly trying the bars at the window, easing his great strength on one of them until the wooden sill creaked under the strain. Chighi's jail was a makeshift affair, designed mainly with an eye to a sobering-up place. Brad turned around, grinning. "Easy enough to pull those things out of their sockets," he commented.

Fred understood that this was the first time Brad had thought of escaping. He knew then he had convinced Brad of his innocence. "None of that," he said sternly. "I've got a plan. I think it'll work, with some good legal talent thrown in."

Brad's eyebrows rose. "Good legal talent costs money," he said dryly, eyeing Fred.

"It'll be easy enough to get Rader to steal something from me," Fred planned, ignoring the other's comment. "Then I'll swear out a warrant and we'll go through Rader's things with a fine-toothed comb. Find a lot of other stolen goods, see? Might even find the forty-four. They hang onto the things they steal. The cadet did."

"Pretty slim chance of that," Brad said. "I see what you mean, though. Prove he's a sneak-thief; show that he stood to gain by the killing; then try to break down his alibi." He shook his head. "Trouble is, kid, we're outa dust. Takes money for things like that."

"We've got money," Fred said quietly, holding the chunk of metal out toward Brad Pace.

Brad took it, examining it close to the oil lamp, while Fred told him what had happened.

The metal was shaped roughly in the form of a twist of chewing tobacco, blackened and embedded with ash except where Meade had scraped it clean with his pocket knife. Here and there, along the main body of it, there were small projections, where the liquid metal had splashed.

Fred was almost through with his story when he saw Brad lift the piece to his ear and slowly bend it. After that he put the metal down, as though losing interest in it. His first question, after Fred was finished, seemed entirely irrelevant. "Do you know whether Red's claim is good?"

"No. He hasn't filed proof of labor for a couple of years. What do we care? There's no more than day wages in the gold, and you can't recover it because of some heavy gravel that keeps choking the riffles."

"You say you burned up the riffle blocks for fuel? Did you see any of that gravel? Maybe small patches of it, frozen to the blocks?"

"I didn't notice especially. What difference does it make?"

Brad shook his head pityingly. "Kid, you should know better than to expect silver in with coal. Listen to this!" He put the metal to Fred's ear and twisted it the other way. Fred could hear a peculiar, whining crackle. He looked at Brad, frowning.

"That's the *cry* of tin," Brad explained.

It took a moment for the truth to sink in. "Then this isn't silver! Just tin!"

Brad smiled. "Just tin, kid," he agreed, sarcastically. "One of the things most needed by the U. S. right now. From the way you describe that gravel I'd say the creek bars, and that delta bar at the river, would go over a thousand dollars a ton. And plenty of it."

"Well, then—"

Brad's voice was savage. "Only you staked the wrong ground, you fool. And you told Sam Birdy and Sam will tell Rader." Brad shook his head. "You even gave Sam a piece of the tin. Won't take Rader long to figure the thing out."

Fred sat for a time, completely

stunned. Then he was on his feet suddenly. "But it'll take him a little while," he said grimly. "And he'll be afraid of night flying."

"Our ship's cracked up! You said you'd bent the propeller!"

Fred was rattling the cell door to attract Old Man Throm. "I'll get that crate up there if I have to paddle it!" he swore.

SAM BIRDY came out to the hangar, about five o'clock that morning. He stopped to watch Fred's work on the landing gear. "I see you tried to straighten that prop blade," he commented.

"I did straighten it," Fred told him.

"Yeah? I'd hate to be the guy who tried to fly with it." He turned on the Indians, who had helped Fred jack the Beechter up for its landing gear. "Come on, you. I gotta get George's ship out."

The Indians didn't seem to hear him. Fred, with foresight, had promised them a hundred dollars apiece for the night's work. To them, that seemed all the money in the world. He kept on with his work, listening to Birdy haggle and plead with the Indians. Later, he heard Birdy on the other side of the partition, struggling alone to get the doors open.

George Rader put in his appearance a little before daylight. He had his two half-breeds with him.

By this time Fred knew almost certainly that he had lost the fight. If he had had any sense he would have broken into the other end of the hangar and damaged Rader's engines. In reverse circumstances that was what the other would have done to him.

Jim Helppi came out, before Rader took off. "I hear Red Southerland made a strike," he said. "A lot of the boys are already outfitting to pack in." There was a question in his voice, and he was searching Meade's face. "For your sake," he said in an unfriendly voice, "I hope there's something out there. You'll find it's pretty damned serious starting a false rumor, my boy."

"Why should I start a false rumor?" Fred demanded, pausing in his work. "What's the matter with you, Jim?"

"Nothing the matter with *me*," the deputy marshal said grimly, starting toward Rader's plane, "except that you're in rough company, my boy. And you might have been put up to some smart tricks."

He meant Bradford Pace, of course.

Fred didn't attach much importance to Helppi's changed attitude, until a few hours later. He stood with the others, a half mile up the creek from Red Southerland's cabin, staring down in horror at the bdoy of Little Claw, lying in a pool of thickening blood. They had already found Brad's forty-four, carrying Brad's fingerprints, where it had been thrown into the brush.

CHAPTER V

LEARN TO FIGHT

AFTER Fred left the jail, Brad Pace took up the cards and went through the motions of playing solitaire. Old Man Throm made his nightly round, about ten o'clock. A little after that Pace blew out the kerosene light and sat on his cot, in the darkness. Several times he stood up, to pace the short distance beside the cot.

Fred Meade had called him a prize damn fool, and he knew that he deserved the title. Everybody had seemed to take it for granted that he killed Toothy Morrison. The very fact that he was in jail seemed to add weight to the accusation. Being confined in the small cell, which was without light from the outside, seemed to rob him of the power to think. He had accepted their verdict that he had killed Toothy and was too drunk at the time to remember.

He had the same as promised Jim Helppi that he wouldn't try to escape. But that was when he considered himself a murderer. Fred had convinced him it wasn't true and he wondered now whether he was justified in breaking his parole.

It wasn't so much for himself as for those miners out on the Breakheart district. Here was their opportunity, probably the last one they would have, of making a little grubstake for their old age. They could get enough money to

equip themselves to work their claims properly. There was gold in Breakheart. The trouble was that it took modern equipment for its recovery.

Brad seldom carried a watch. He had no way of knowing the time, but it must have been well after midnight before he came to a decision. After that it required two hours or more of stealthy effort to get one bar entirely out of its sockets and bend the others until there was room for his large body.

The storm shutter, lined with tar paper and nailed to the outside, took only a few minutes. He had the loose bar to work with as a hammer and a pry.

The town was still awake, lights on in the pool hall and trading post. Brad slipped past, on the other side of the street, and saw the feverish preparations for the long pack trip into Breakheart Creek.

He wasn't worried about these men. George Rader was the one he had to stop. He went first to the cabin, for "Notice of Location" blanks. False dawn was spreading over the eastern sky before he reached the airfield and hid by the woodshed, to scout the territory.

Rader came, with Frank and the other half-breed, and Pace heard them getting the Klim out and starting its engines. He wondered why Fred hadn't put trouble into those engines. There were a dozen ways he could have done that. Or he could have slashed the fabric covering of the elevators or rudder.

Pace wasn't quite sure of his feelings toward Fred Meade. He liked the young fellow and pitied him because of his injured leg, but he had never given him a man-to-man respect. To him, Fred Meade was just a kid, who had a lot of growing up to do. He had to learn to enjoy a good, tough fight. That was life, as Brad Pace knew it.

Jim Helppi came and stood for a moment, talking with Meade, and then went over to talk with George Rader. The presence of the deputy marshal changed everything. Brad had figured that Rader would stake out the creek and sandbar, leaving the two breeds to guard his claims while he left for Fairbanks to record them. While he was gone, Pace could do a little claim jumping himself.

When Jim Helppi got into the plane with Rader, Brad knew that he was practically licked. There wouldn't be much chance of claim jumping with Helppi around. Nevertheless, Pace wasn't going to give up.

Fred had the right wheel on and was working with the left, when Pace came out into the open and joined him. "Thought I might be some help, kid," he said to the other's look of surprise and anger. "Come on, there's no time for arguin'."

THEY were in the air less than two hours after Rader's takeoff. Brad was in the left-hand, pilot seat. The Beechter was vibrating from end-to-end with the imperfectly balanced propeller blades and Fred Meade sat in a stiff, crouched position, both hands clenched on his knees.

"Afraid, kid?" Brad asked, grinning at the younger man.

"Of course I'm afraid!" Meade shot back. "You know what usually happens when an engine throws its prop."

"Don't worry," Brad reassured him. "I could fight the old crate down on one wing," he bragged.

He was sorry immediately that he had said that. There was something close to scorn in the boy's face. "I want you to stop calling me 'kid'," Meade said. "Are you just going to bull your way up there on pure luck and fighting, or have you got some kind of a plan?"

That tone bothered Pace. "I got a plan, all right," he said grimly. "I'm just starting to fight."

Fred didn't speak again. His aloofness hurt Brad and made him feel aggrieved. After all, he had given this kid a job when he didn't know a thing about hard weather flying, when he couldn't get a job any other place.

On the other hand, Fred had never before questioned his judgment. Looking back over the long, hard winter Pace had to admit to himself that he had imposed on Meade; had more or less taken him for granted. He remembered once how sharp he had been when Meade called him "partner."

"I'm not anybody's partner," he had

said, in a flash of anger. "I fell for that partnership stuff with George Rader. Once is enough."

It had hurt Fred, being classified with George Rader. But Brad had been too angry at the time to apologize.

As always, when faced with a problem of this sort, Brad Pace felt the need for physical action. He wanted to cut through the Gordian knot that entangled him, willing to suffer the consequences.

"Look here, Meade," he said, "you asked about my plan. I'm going to land on that bar, up-river from the creek."

"Over those trees!"

"Over those trees. I'll make it or crack up. You afraid?"

Meade's voice was harsh. "Damn you, I'll ride through any crack up you will!" Immediately afterward, he was apologetic. "Let's don't quarrel, Brad. Not at a time like this."

"Sure we won't," Pace agreed, catching himself on the point of saying 'kid.' "All I ask from you is to get Jim Helppi down to Red's cabin and keep him there, on one excuse or another. Make out that you flew up here alone, see? After that you can have this Beechter. And anything else I've got left down at Chighi. Is it a go?"

Meade shook his head. "I never asked anything from you, Brad, except—" He stopped himself. You can't beg that a man respect you and treat you like an equal, like a partner. "All right, Brad," he finished, "I'll try to take care of Helppi for you."

BRAD had flown south of the course. He dropped off altitude as they approached Red's claim and went on past the creek bar, so low that the plane couldn't be seen from the cabin. He made a vertical turn and saw Meade's face tighten as he kicked upper rudder in a nose-high sideslip.

It was the only way of getting down past the trees, onto the upper sandbar.

The maneuver was pure dynamite. Stalling, halfway in a spin, they dropped below tree level.

Pace jerked wheel to the right, lifting his wing. He left on full right rudder. The wing came up with a sullen grunt. Immediately they were in a fishtail, at almost right angle to their line-of-flight.

Pace held it grimly until the last split-second. He reversed rudder, booting it savagely. They had lost flying speed. The wheels struck while they were still turned slightly from line-of-flight. Odds were in favor of the landing gear caving, from side strain. But it held.

Fred's face was a pale mask.

"We made it!" Brad shouted his exultation. "The old man can still fly."

"Yeah," Fred agreed, "we made it." He got out of the plane and started toward Red Southerland's cabin, following the shoreline.

Pace watched his stiff-legged gait. There was something here that he didn't understand. No time though, now, to be mooning over such things.

He crossed over the sharp, wooded ridge that separated the Chighi River from Breakheart Creek. He felt that warm glow of vitality that always came over him at the prospect of a fight.

Skirting Red's claim, so as to be out of sight in the timber, Pace made his way across the creek bottom. The creek ice was already getting spongy from the warm weather.

Characteristically, Brad's plan was simple and direct. He would have to catch George Rader separate from the two breeds. Rader wouldn't be flying any plane into Fairbanks when he got through with him. As for the two half-breeds, that was a problem for the future, after he had taken care of their boss. Pace seldom troubled his mind over the future.

He had reached a point opposite Red's hydraulic "giant" when one of the half-breeds, hidden from Pace's view, let out a guttural cry of warning.

Pace thought that his presence had been discovered. There was no time now for stealth. He swung in long strides in the direction of the voice.

A pistol exploded in the brittle air. It made a report like a piece of field artillery. Pace's charge carried him out into the open before he could stop himself.

George Rader was in a stooping position. He came erect, holding something in his left hand for a moment before slipping it inside his mackinaw. He stood

over a man's figure that still jerked with the reflexes of death. Rader's lips were drawn back like a snarling wolf. His black eyes and narrow face were a picture of savage lust. A pistol dangled from his right hand. Pace recognized it instantly.

One of the half-breeds stood between Pace and the killer. Pace scarcely paused. His fist came down with the same chopping blow that a butcher uses with his cleaver. It caught the breed on his neck, back of his ear. He dropped, rolling over and over down the steep slope.

Rader whirled, crouching. He raised the heavy frontier revolver, bringing it down to a bead on Pace's chest. His finger tightened. The gun quivered with the strain that he exerted on the trigger. Nothing happened.

Pace was on him, grabbed his wrist, twisting it. Rader's grip loosened and Pace took the gun from him and stood back. "Kinda forgot something, didn't you?" he taunted. "You gotta cock this baby to fire it."

"Don't—you can't shoot me like that, Pace!"

Pace still held the gun leveled on Rader. "No?" he said slowly, enjoying the other's fear. "You're wrong there, Rader. I could shoot you, just as easy as I could shoot a mangy wolf. It'd never bother my dreams, Rader."

His thumb moved up, to crook over the hammer. Then, deliberately, he tossed the gun aside. His voice was a harsh undertone. "Only I'll get more fun outa killing you with my bare hands."

Rader was trying to get a gun from an inside pocket of his mackinaw when Pace's fist smashed his lips against his teeth. It was a left jab and the next instant the right followed with the same piston-like force. Rader's nose pulped under the blow.

THERE was no mercy in Pace. He meant it literally when he said that he was going to kill Rader barehanded. He could have knocked him unconscious a dozen times. Instead he deliberately went about the business of cutting his face to ribbons.

Pace had forgotten about Frank, the other half-breed. For more than two years Rader had made a fool of him. He had drawn Pace into a hateful partnership, making a cunning use of his impulsiveness and his love of gambling. After that he had employed every underhand trick he knew, to ruin him.

There was room for only one thought in Pace's mind. Revenge. A revenge as savage and ruthless as any half-wild Malemute who has been kicked and beaten and starved.

The breed, clutching a heavy piece of gravel, waited his chance. He struck

Pace from behind, a clumsy downward swing. But there was weight in the blow.

Pace's knees gave under him. He was still conscious, struggling with a pain that blinded him, trying to get back onto his feet.

Now that he was down the half-breed moved in boldly to finish him off.

Rader's voice was sharp. "Stop it, Frank! Stop it, or I'll shoot you."

Pace had a slow wonder at this intervention. And then he heard Jim Helppi's voice. "Who fired that shot?"

He turned over onto his side. It took all the strength he had to stand erect, staggering as he had never staggered under the effects of liquor. But gradually his head cleared.

Rader's voice was cool. "You'll find the gun over there," he said. "This time we caught him in the act."

Helppi's voice had the cold edge of a knife. "So you flew out here alone, did you, Meade? And you wanted to show me how that tin smelted down in the stove." His voice thickened with anger. "Damn you for a milk-fed, sniveling cripple! I'll show you two that there's more than six-gun law up here in Alaska."

Pace shook his head, to clear it. "The kid's not in on this, Jim. He didn't know—"

"Shut up, you damned killer!"

Fred Meade's voice was just as hard as the marshal's. "Whoever killed Little Claw, his fingerprints will be on the butt on that forty-four. If you let Rader or anybody else touch it you're going to be damned sorry, Helppi."

Pace became aware for the first time that Mrs. Southerland was with Fred and Jim Helppi. Her voice was grim. "An' I'm a witness to that, Helppi. You're acting like a half-growed kid."

"No use," Brad said, his voice sounding queer to his own ears, as though somebody else was talking. "I had the gun in my hand. Rader did it, but I took the gun from him."

"Why should I kill the Aleut?" Rader demanded.

Mrs. Southerland's voice was triumphant. "Why? Because I sent Claw up here. I promised him a quart of whiskey for every monument of yours that he kicked over, and for every claim notice he brought me. I can prove that by his squaw."

"Of course," Helppi reminded her, "you know what it means to give an Indian whiskey."

"Of course I do. That's the law. An' the same law says that fellas like this Rader can starve honest folks to death. What kind of law is that?"

Helppi had gotten control of himself. "I don't want to argue with you, Mrs. Southerland. But even if Claw was causing Rader some trouble, he wouldn't shoot him. Why should he when a sound kick would do as well?"

There was very little hope in Fred's voice.

"Rader might have shot in self-defense. If Claw had a gun, and they caught him stealing one of the notices, he might—"

"He hasn't got a gun," Rader said confidently. "He hasn't any kind of weapon. Look around—search him, why don't you?"

Pace saw Fred Meade's eyes narrow. "You seem awfully sure of that, Rader. How could you be so positive?"

Something stirred in Brad's mind. Some vague memory that eluded him, pushed aside by the throbbing pain from the blow he had received. He watched stupidly while the deputy searched and found the death weapon and carefully wrapped it in a bandana handkerchief. A further search of the area and of Little Claw's clothing revealed no other weapon.

When this was over Jim Helppi stood in silent thought for a time. "Well," he said, finally, his voice a dead monotone, "I guess that's that." He looked straight at Brad Pace. "Nobody'll spill any tears over Little Claw," he said gravely. "Not even his squaw. But I've lost a friend today. And I've lost all confidence in my judgment of men. It's one thing killing when you're drunk, and another murdering when you're cold sober."

Helppi turned to George Rader. "Guess you'll be wanting to fly into Fairbanks and record those claims, George. Go on get your engines started. I'll bring these other two down directly."

BRAD PACE could still hear, echoing in his mind, that sentence Jim Helppi had passed on him. He wouldn't have minded so much if there had been any triumph or malice in it. It had been the simple statement of a man whose trust in humanity had been betrayed. And even though Jim was wrong, Brad couldn't find it in his heart to blame him. He would have felt the same way in Jim's place, with similar evidence.

Rader had increased the speed of his walk. With the breed directly behind him, he was leading them now by a hundred yards.

Mrs. Southerland was bringing up the rear. Brad turned at the sound of cracking wood. She had broken off a dead spruce limb and was using it for a walking stick.

Mrs. Southerland's stick landed with a sharp thud.

Rader and the half-breed were leading the way. Fred Meade was a short distance behind them, walking with his head bowed, as though he already felt the shame of what was before him. Accomplice to a murderer. That's what it would amount to.

"Don't worry, kid," Brad said. "I won't let them drag you into this."

Fred whirled. "I told you not to call me 'kid' any more," he warned. "And if you think I'm through fighting, you've got another guess."

They came opposite the cabin. Elsie, Little Claw's wife, stood before the lean-to that was built against the wall of the cabin. She looked like a statue, stolid and unmoved.

"We'll stop in here," Jim Helppi said. "I want to have a word with Red, Mrs. Southerland. This creek isn't going to be any place for a woman with a sick husband."

Rader was only a few yards from where the path turned abruptly down

toward the river sandbar. His pace had increased to dog-trot.

Elsie Claw spoke, in the correct, stilted English that she had learned in a missionary school. "He stole my knife, Mrs. Southerland."

Fred Meade stopped dead in his tracks. "Who stole your knife?" The words had a whip-like crack to them.

"Little Claw, he stole my knife."

Brad Pace, who prided himself on being able to think fast, looked on in astonishment as Fred Meade started down the path on a run. It was hard to believe

He couldn't hang on much longer—he was being blown back like a rag in the wind.

that anybody could move so fast with a stiff leg.

"Meade!" Helppi shouted. "Stop, you fool, or I'll have to shoot!"

Brad turned, ready to throw himself onto the marshal and spoil his aim.

Helppi had his gun half drawn when Mrs. Southerland's stick made a blurred arc.

It landed with a sharp thud. Helppi clutched at his elbow, crying out sharply with the unbearable pain.

The woman lunged at the gun, like a flapping scarecrow in the wind. She wrenched it from the officer's holster and threw it, narrowly missing Brad Pace's head.

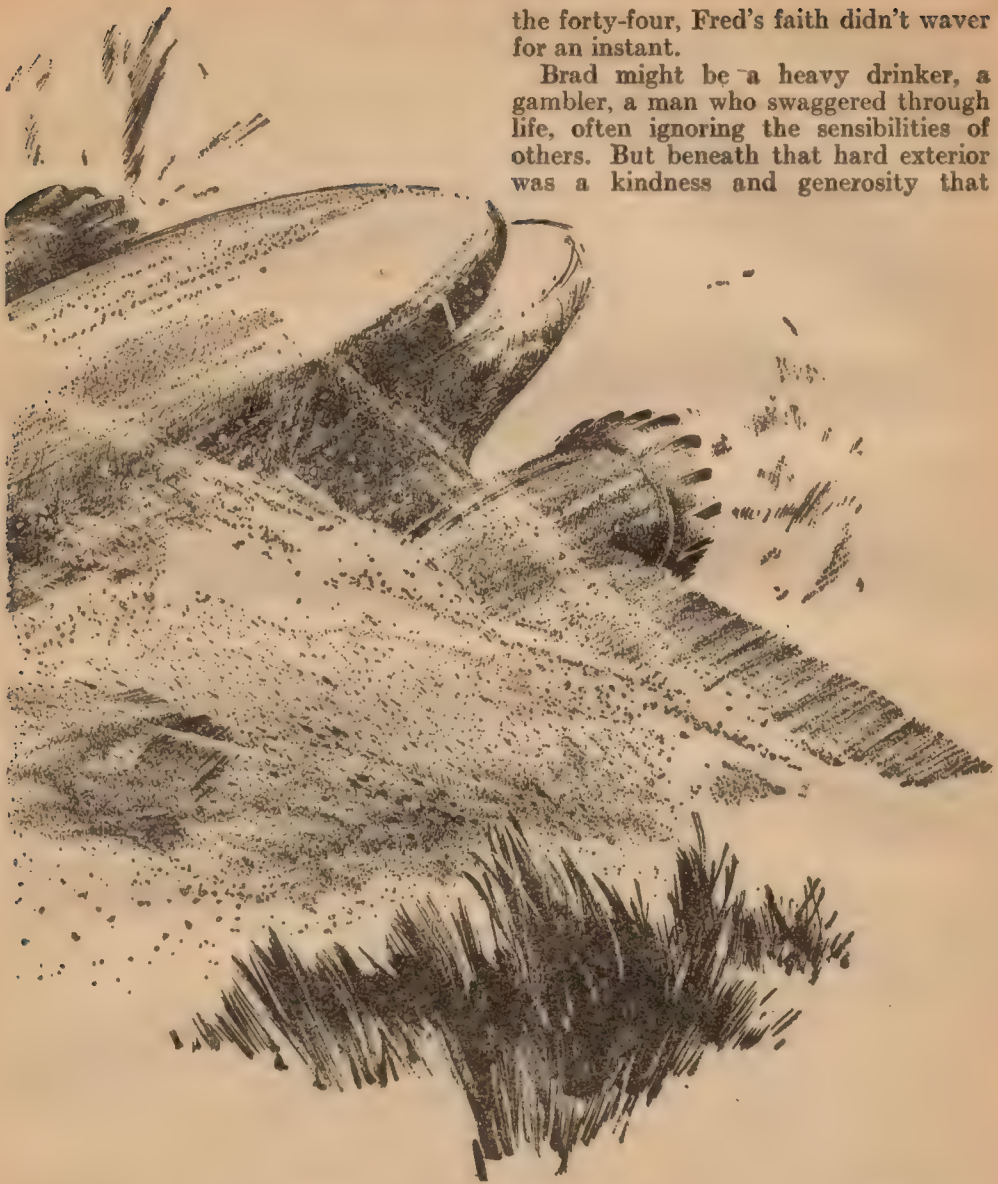
"You will, will you!" she screamed. "You will, will you!"

Pace didn't wait for more. He was down the path at a dead run after Fred.

Jim Helppi, recovering almost immediately from his surprise pounded after him, his boots clattering in the loose gravel.

Suddenly all the minor noises were submerged under the roar of an airplane engine.

The other engine of the Klim awoke to life as Brad turned onto the last stretch leading to the sandbar. The airplane was already in motion. Fred Meade was running beside it, reaching for the cabin door handle, when the propeller blast struck him like a gale. He was lifted off his feet and the next instant scooped up by the knifing edge of the vertical stabilizer.



the forty-four, Fred's faith didn't waver for an instant.

Brad might be a heavy drinker, a gambler, a man who swaggered through life, often ignoring the sensibilities of others. But beneath that hard exterior was a kindness and generosity that

CHAPTER VI

CALL ME PARTNER

THERE was one thing certain in Fred's mind. Brad Pace wasn't a murderer. He had told Jim Helppi that he wouldn't believe it, even if he saw Brad in the very act.

So, when Brad Pace freely admitted that they would find his fingerprints on passed all understanding. Brad Pace would give you the shirt off his back; yes, and if it was needed, in the face of a blizzard. And then he would pick you up onto his broad shoulders and carry you to safety.

Yes, he would laugh at your weakness while he was doing it. That was because he had never quite grown up. He still had a small boy's cruelty. But there wasn't a mean drop of blood in his body.

Meade wasn't anybody's fool. He

realized that at first he had given the older pilot a blind hero-worship. He knew better than that now. Pace was a hard man. Too much friendliness embarrassed him, made him ill at ease and on his guard. It would take a real man to earn Pace's respect and friendship.

The only loophole that Fred could see in the case against Brad was that there was no more reason for his killing the Aleut than there was for George Rader. If anything there was less reason.

Claw was a pretty poor speciman of a man. But, given the provocation, any animal will fight. If Rader had caught the Aleut destroying his claim stakes or stealing the notices, he would most certainly have punished him.

At that point Fred's reasoning butted against the hard wall of reality. Unarmed and perfectly sober, no Aleut was ever up to attacking a white man. Such a thing was inconceivable.

Fred's mind admitted the truth of that when Rader said, with absolute certainty in his voice: "He hasn't got a gun. He hasn't any kind of weapon."

How could George Rader be so sure? Because he had searched the Aleut?

That seemed the answer. And yet it would be a strange thing in this country, for one man to kill another and then immediately search him for a weapon.

Fred knew that the answer was there in his mind.

The thing was so completely simple. "Little Claw, he stole my knife."

There it was! And Rader, hearing the squaw's words, knew that his only salvation lay in taking off in his plane and dropping the knife some place. Once rid of the damning evidence, he could explain his flight in some manner. Or it would be up to a court of law to prove that it was sure indication of his guilt.

Perhaps Rader had first taken the knife on instinct, the instinct of a born thief. He was too clever then, to throw it away, certain of its carrying his fingerprints.

FRED had heard Jim Helppi's warning that he would shoot. He'd expected any instant to feel the numbing impact of a forty-five. Jim wouldn't try to kill him. Shooting at his legs there was a chance of him missing.

Fred's mind had room for just the one thought. He must keep Rader from taking off. It wasn't so much a matter of courage, perhaps, as it was the impelling urgency of that one thought. He was like a torpedo, instruments set for depth and direction. Nothing could stop him, short of his own destruction or fulfillment of his purpose.

He was scarcely aware of pain when struck by the moving airplane surface. He felt it lift under him, the tailwheel riding free of the rough sand.

Without being aware of his action, Fred had hooked both arms around the vertical fin. His proximity to the ground increased the sense of speed. It seemed that already the Klim was ready to leave the earth.

Fred had no illusions as to what would happen, once they got a few feet in the air. He knew exactly what he would do in the cockpit, to relieve himself of such a burden. Give him fifty feet altitude and just a few miles in excess of minimum flying speed.

He could shake the strongest man in the world loose from that precarious hold. Shove the control wheel forward, hold it till the wheels were a few inches from the ground. Then a quick backjerk on the yoke. You might cave in the tailwheel. Certainly you would get rid of the load.

He couldn't hang on much longer. He was being blown back like a rag in the wind. The Klim was making its preliminary crow hops. It was a hard ship to keep onto the ground for a smooth takeoff. It wanted to get away, just a few miles under airspeed. If allowed to do this, it would immediately stall, giving the landing gear a nasty jolt.

The rudder was slamming back and forth. Meade could feel it strike his feet and legs. If Rader was a better pilot he would know the danger of trying to get rid of him that way. These Klims were hell for a groundloop on takeoff.

For a groundloop! Why, if he hadn't been a stupid fool he could have put an end to the flight long ago!

He was at the very end of the leverage that controlled the ship in vertical and

horizontal planes. He could have stopped the flight with little danger to himself.

It was too late now to avoid death. But at least he would stop the flight. They would find the knife on Rader and that alone would be enough to convict him.

He pulled with all the strength of his arms to get himself into position. Then he kicked.

His foot caved through the taut fabric. He could feel the delicate wooden members crush. He jack-knifed his leg with a quick, hard jerk and felt the rudder swing sharply over to the left.

The ship swerved. Centrifugal force held his body tight against the vertical fin.

Abruptly the thunder of the engines ceased. Rader, in his panic, must have jerked the masterswitch. With the right engine throttled and the left wide open, he might have had a chance of gunning it out of the turn.

Nothing could stop it now!

The next instant Meade was catapulted through the air. He had no sense of motion. He was stationary and the earth was being jerked beneath him. He heard the tortured death scream of the airplane and then a series of crashes as it rolled wing over wing. . . .

JIM HELPPI'S voice said: "Two more days, Brad, and that snowdrift would have been melted down to the bare gravel. Was there ever a kid as lucky as this one?"

"Or so damned, unbelievably gritty?" Brad Pace agreed. He spoke in a hushed voice, as though confronted with some miracle beyond his understanding. "Jim, if his claim doesn't pan out enough, he's goin' to get every cent of mine. He's goin' to get that bum leg fixed up and have his chance in one of Uncle Sam's pursuit jobs. I only wish I was young enough to be in the squadron he'll be leading some time against those grinning Japanese apes. Lord have pity on them!"

"Which He won't," Mrs. Southerland's voice said acidly.

Fred tried to move his head. There was excruciating pain and the sense of being embedded in stone. He opened his eyes and saw that he was in Red Southerland's cabin. But what an unbelievable change. There were white sheets on the bed and a woman in starched nurse's linen was trying to push Brad and the others away. "You'll have to leave now," she commanded.

Fred wanted to speak and yet had a strange reluctance to exert himself. He felt as though he was going to sleep with his eyes wide open.

"Take it easy," Brad said to the nurse. "Don't a guy want to know what's happened while he's been dead to the world for better'n a week?"

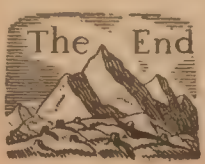
Fred wasn't in the least interested. But he had to support Brad. "What . . . happened?" he asked, each word a heavy weight of effort.

"See!" Brad triumphed over the nurse. "Look, Fred. You had it doped out right. We found the knife on him. Both Rader and the breed are in the Fairbanks hospital and'll live to face a jury. We wasn't goin' to take any chances movin' you, so we brought the hospital up here. You got enough plaster cast on you to sink a battleship but the Doc says everything's O. K. I—what else do you want to know, kid?"

"Don't . . . call . . . me . . . kid!"

Brad's face went blank. Only his eyes had expression; a hurt, puzzled expression. "Aren't we partners, kid?"

Fred's lips widened. "Partners," he whispered. "Yeah, Brad . . . that's what I . . ." The thought faded like an elusive shadow. He was so sleepy. He couldn't remember when he had ever been so sleepy. Anyway, Brad—his partner—would understand.



A BOTTLE A DAY

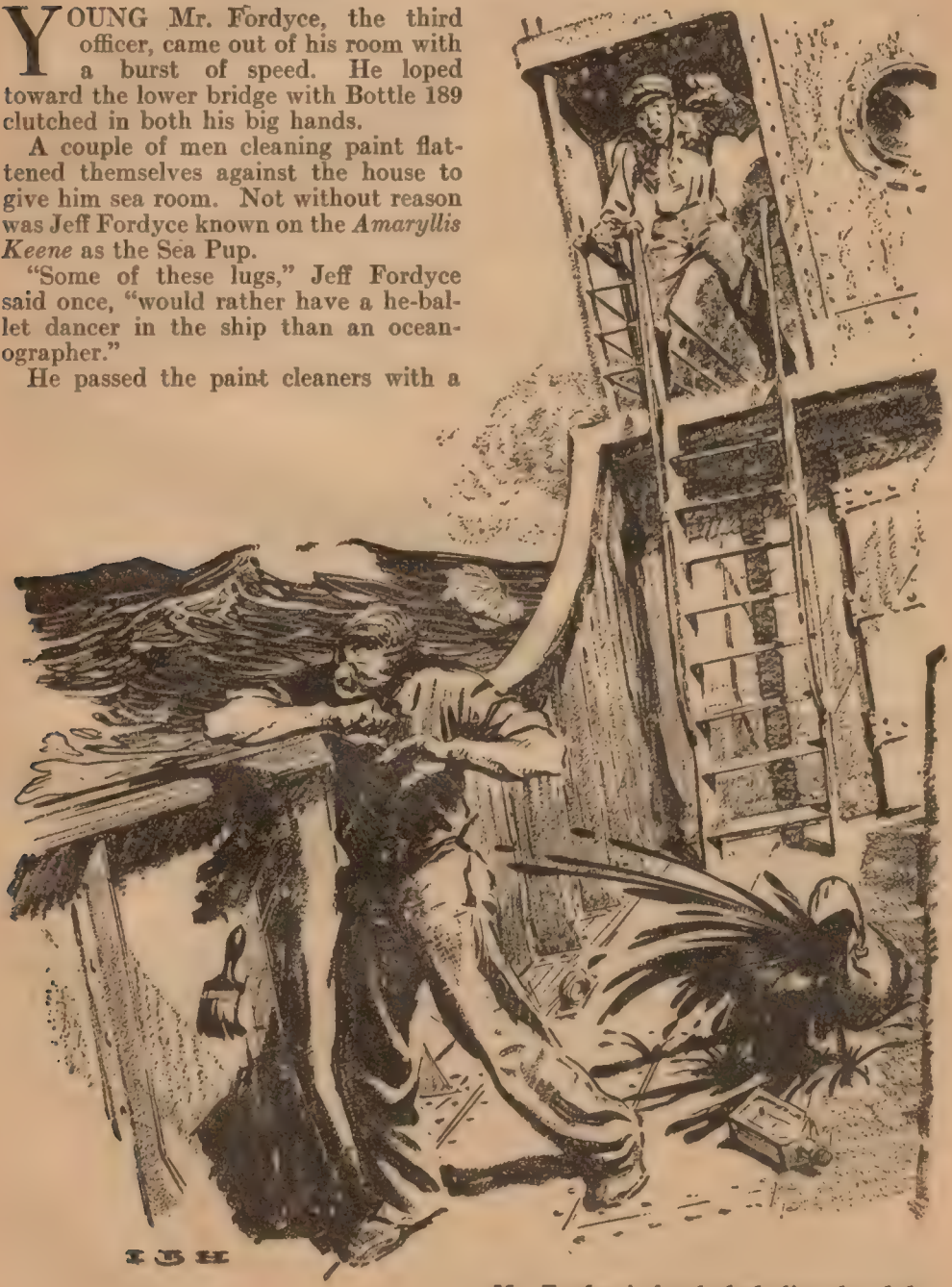
By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

YOUNG Mr. Fordyce, the third officer, came out of his room with a burst of speed. He loped toward the lower bridge with Bottle 189 clutched in both his big hands.

A couple of men cleaning paint flattened themselves against the house to give him sea room. Not without reason was Jeff Fordyce known on the *Amaryllis Keene* as the Sea Pup.

"Some of these lugs," Jeff Fordyce said once, "would rather have a he-ballet dancer in the ship than an oceanographer."

He passed the paint cleaners with a



Mr. Fordyce's bottle had slipped and done the boatswain and paintpot a disservice down on the well deck.

rush, solicitously protecting Bottle 189 from contacts. There was fate in that bottle.

Jeff got where he was going without mishap. He balanced his long body, a thing of queer projections and unpredictable postures, on his outspread legs and heaved the bottle. It soared into the air as a seagull rises in the updraft abaft the stern of a ship. It plunked down into a blue sea with a flurry of whiteness, then bobbed up, far from any interference by the screw of the *Amaryllis*.

Mr. Fordyce smiled at the world. He liked to get his 1 P. M. bottle into the ocean currents on time. The Hydrographic office, for whose benefit Jeff Fordyce heaved bottles into the sea, made a fetish of accuracy.

"Right on the button," he said to John Ball, the second officer, who was hanging over the bridge rail.

Ball shrugged. "You missed me," he said.

There had been that time south of the Grand Banks when Mr. Fordyce's bottle had slipped and done the boatswain and paintpot a disservice down on the well deck.

"You should have told the world that we had beans for dinner for the third time in a row," the Second said, with a jerk of his head toward the drifting bottle.

MR. UPSON, the chief officer, who had come to the bridge to retrieve his sextant, visibly had an idea. It stopped his toothpick in mid course. His gaze shifted from the bottle bobbing astern to sheer infinity. The rapt expression on his face drew eyes.

Mr. Upson, of a sudden, pulled his cap to a devil-may-care angle and shook his head admiringly at himself. Then, still deep in thought, he left the bridge.

The bottle had done its work.

"What's the mate looking clever about?" Fordyce asked.

The Second shrugged again. "From the set of his mug he's figured out a sure third strike on you. He can just see his wife's nephew in your job and his wife off his neck."

"That's eyesight," said Jeff Fordyce. "Upson can't get the Old Man to beach me just for running into him a couple of times."

"Watch your step, kid," said Mr. Ball, who liked drama involving other people. "And don't try to tell me you can figure the Old Man—outside of a war zone."

Mr. Fordyce nodded carelessly. He was too valuable a man, in spite of his small failings, to worry about his job. Further, he knew how John Ball hungered for the dramatic. He hurried back to his room, missing a bucket of soojimouji by a hair. In privacy he broke into a series of exercises designed to improve the teamwork of his long limbs and to ungangle his gangling six feet odd inches of body. He went through the motions almost contemptuously, with his mind on higher things, like ocean currents and prevailing winds.

He had a girl in Newark who did not think he was awkward.

Breathing a bit harder he paused to spread out on his bunk a pilot chart of the North Atlantic for April. The track they were following to Lisbon would put them north of the Azores within thirty-six hours. Besides his two daily bottles he'd better put over several more which, if returned to Washington, might indicate how much the easterly current turned southward among the islands. He cupped his hands over his ears. "An interesting point, the amount of southerly set," he said. Thus heard, his voice certainly had an authentic mild and scholarly tone.

He sought the steward's pantry. Here he knew he was welcome. Needing bottles, he was the only officer aboard who did not kick about the grub. Nobody in a ship paid the slightest attention to the complaints of a third mate, anyhow.

"Any bottles, Pindar?" he asked.

The steward reached down and brought up an empty gin bottle.

"With the chief engineer's compliments an' he's workin' on another in the interests of science," Pindar said. He moved his Adam's apple up and down his long neck a few times to indicate amusement.

Most unexpectedly Mr. Upson's narrow, slightly bent figure came in from

the messroom. There was a benevolent smile on his face. He laid a hand on Jeff's shoulder.

"More dope for Washington, hey?" he said, looking at the square bottle. "What d'you put in the bottle—just position?"

"That and the date, sir," Jeff said. The mate had shown interest in his bottles only when the boatswain, hit in the chest, had spilled his paint bucket.

"Show me the form, son," said the mate and amiably accompanied Jeff to his room. He watched as Jeff typed out a sample of his bottle message technique, smiling to the limit of his guns.

All of this possible to observe from the bridge was keenly and incredulously noted by Mr. Ball. A gossip columnist lost at sea, was the Second. He made a trip aft ostensibly to inspect the workings of the taffrail log.

"Right when it's time for the Old Man to start getting jittery about the war, too," Second Officer Ball said to Jeff. "Right then is when Mr. Upson gets excited about bottles and science! Watch your hat and overcoat, kid."

Jeff Fordyce considered this angle. With the Azores ahead a tension would begin tightening up. The *Amaryllis* was heading for the war, a ship of peace and commerce, and she had no answers to violence save the American flag painted on her sides. Even self-protection was illegal for a neutral merchantman in this year of violence, 1941.

The plump, taciturn Old Man, pacing the bridge unendingly, would grow more dignified and more formal in his relations with his officers. In the last war he had been torpedoed by a U-boat, had nearly died of wounds and thirst in an open boat, and had never forgotten.

All hands sensed Captain Gaines' belief that one day the Nazis were likely to let go without warning something heavy and explosive against his ship. True, the *Amaryllis* had no munitions aboard and was bound for a neutral port. But with the American Navy out patrolling—

"The Nazis must know that sinking us on a peaceful mission would make the country sore to the point of full war," Jeff Fordyce had argued. "They couldn't think it would scare us."

John Ball had laughed. "They've never figured us right yet," he said. "Why should they get smart now? Pillow your sunburnt cheek every night on a life-jacket, kid."

AS THE *Amaryllis*, full and down with her wheat, cased machinery and other general cargo, plowed blue seas into white, Captain Gaines reacted almost according to expectations. But Mr. Upson did not. He continued to wear his cap at what the observant Second reported was the angle of deep cleverness.

The Old Man watched more sharply the oceanographical doings of Jeff Fordyce.

"Upson's been breathing a lot in old Gaines' ear," the Second warned. "His nephew is a lot closer to your job than you think."

Jeff Fordyce laughed.

"Bottles!" Mr. Ball said and sniffed. "When your old gums meet they'll give you a pension because you were once shipmates with my bottles," Jeff said.

He started buoyantly from the wheelhouse, hooked an elbow into the wheel and put her a point off before he could extricate himself.

The *Amaryllis* thrust the unseen peaks of the Azores onto her starboard quarter and trudged along through the unkind whistlings of a force five northerly. Fourteen knots was about her gait when the chief engineer's stomach was not in too violent rebellion against the gin. He'd always ease her off a few revolutions when he was making heavy weather of it himself.

Mr. Fordyce collected data on leeway due to a beam wind. He was still struggling with variables such as trim, load and weight of wind, when, with no more than an inquiring glance from a British patrol, she made landfall. She picked up a pilot and thrashed her way up the mud of the Tagus to Lisbon.

Not far up the river all hands lined the side of the ship to look with a certain fixity at a six thousand ton merchant ship beached at an ungainly angle on the left bank of the stream. Her bow had been torn off by the impact of a mine or

torpedo. Captain Gaines scowled at her. She didn't look pretty with Number One hold gaping wide in the sun.

It was at Lisbon, on the second day of discharging, that Fordyce, sweating mightily and coated with dust, emerged from Number One hold in time to see something strange. Mr. Upson, on the well deck, was waving up to the bridge-house a saddle-colored Portugee with a look of the sea about him. The Portugee sailor had a seaweed-covered bottle in his hand.

Mr. Upson made for Jeff Fordyce at once. "How about that stuff for'ard in the 'tween decks?" he said. "We'll overcarry half of it if—get down there and watch 'em!"

Jeff obeyed reluctantly, nearly losing his grip on an iron rung. A bottle from the sea! If it were one launched by him it should be on its way to Washington with a concise statement from the finder as to where and when it had been picked up.

"Maybe the Old Man will call me up and I can drag out of the Portugee where he picked it up," he said hopefully as he looked at marks on the stuff in the 'tween decks.

But the Old Man did not call him. In fact that evening as the Old Man went ashore with the agent he directed a glance of penetrant disapproval at Jeff Fordyce.

That was all Jeff knew about it until John Ball waylaid him next day.

"You're in the barrel," said the psychic Second. "A Portugee brought a bottle aboard yesterday—one o' your bottles. Only—you ain't been kidding us, have you?—instead of a note about latitude and longitude there was a poem in it."

"A poem!"

"One of the lamest limericks I ever read," said the Second. "All about the Old Man of the *Amaryllis Keene,* the scariest old goat that ever was seen. That stuff."

He looked hard at Jeff Fordyce. "You'd ought to be able to write funnier rhymes than that about old Gaines."

"If I had written it, it would have been funnier," Jeff said.

"The Old Man's sleuthing in your room now, comparing the typewriting with what your machine puts out," Mr. Ball said.

JEFF hurried up to his room. Captain Gaines was coming out. He had a stained sheet of paper in his fingers. When Jeff started to speak the master raised a hairy-backed hand.

"No doubt you did not write this, Mr. Fordyce, though it was done on your machine," he snapped. His black eyes glared. "No doubt your distribution of bottles has been for scientific reasons in spite of your juvenile caperings in this ship. Very good. I consider your denial made."

His upraised hand became a fist, fat but with a skeleton of granite-hard bone and muscle underlying the flesh.

"You will send out no more bottle messages from this ship until we reach New York, Mr. Fordyce," he said. "After that—" He nodded grimly. "If you have any possibilities of other em-

ployment I suggest you start writing now by clipper mail."

He strode away.

"Bilgewater to him!" Jeff stared after the stiff rotundity of the angry Old Man. "If he thinks I'm going to lose an argument with him he's crazy."

He stepped out onto the lower bridge, draped himself across the rail and looked unseeingly at the rising roofs of the city of secret agents. But all the swirling currents of the war engulfing Lisbon failed to register in his mind.

"Plenty of steamship lines will jump at the chance of signing on a third mate with brains," he told himself. He paused, thinking of the girl in Newark. "Sure they will," he said. "Sure!"

He shook off momentary and unworthy doubt. His eyes dropped down to the well deck and he discovered Mr. Upson, almost completely ambushed by the foremast, staring up at him. The mate, instead of blasphemously recommending Jeff to come down to his duty, popped behind the steel stick.

"That———!" said Jeff. "Can he write poetry? I reckon a guy who can't keep his own wife off his neck will do anything."

It would have been a cinch for the mate to get into his room while he was on watch, fake a bottle and send it aboard. Jeff pelted down to the well deck. After tripping over a winch cable he cornered Mr. Upson by the break of the forecastle.

"That nephew o' yours certainly needs a job," Mr. Fordyce said. "And there might be one going. Has he got a first officer's ticket?"

Upson jerked an imperative hand at Number Two hatch. "Get going, you!" he said. "Cap'n Gaines and I are onto you. Sling that stuff out or you'll be weeping on the consul's shoulder for a passage home."

"Here's news," said Jeff. "I like this ship to study currents in and I'm staying in her. That's why I don't hammer you down to fit your kid-size brain."

Jeff went to work. Sitdowns weren't in his line.

"It's no other man's business if I want to drop bottles in the sea on my own time," he told himself. "I'll leave the ship's name off of them. But over they go!"

The strength of the southward set of current along the much traveled Portuguese coast was important. For the first time since he had been in her the *Amaryllis* was going to drop a thousand tons of cased stuff at Oporto.

"I can't neglect a chance like that," he decided. "A guy with no job and a girl might as well fool with currents. I can't prove anything against Upson."

WHEN the *Amaryllis* pulled away from her pier next morning, Mr. Fordyce, on the bridge with the Old Man, was not occupied solely with currents. Fog, regular gray northern fog, filled the Tagus from bank to bank. Sunny Portugal was eclipsed.

On the forecastle head Mr. Upson, standing handy to the brake of the anchor windlass with the carpenter beside him, peered tensely ahead. Wife's nephews with tickets weren't in his mind. Even Mr. Ball, still aft coiling down, was not looking for items of personal interest in the pea souper.

In spite of the fog Jeff was churning in his head the course Captain Gaines had laid out for the northerly haul. The line was well within the hundred fathom curve—in fact it was unpleasantly close to the coast.

Jeff Fordyce understood why when he heard the Old Man questioning the pilot in some strange and broken language which was Gaines' approach to Portuguese. The Old Man was asking how much of a berth U-boats and commerce raiders gave the coast. Jeff deduced from the gestures and explanations of the pilot that he was not optimistic concerning their respect for Portuguese territorial waters.

The ship with the bow blown off was invisible in the fog. But Jeff could see that she still loomed high in the Old Man's mind. She had an unpleasant look that stayed with a man, that ship without a bow.

Jeff struck her from his thoughts. Relieved at noon, with the fog still as thick as muslin, he went below for a look at his own private chart. The ship was

on the course that should take her to the mouth of the Douro. Apparently the Old Man had slight regard for the southbound current. To Jeff's mind, with the coast trending east of north the stream might set the ship toward shore. There was one headland not many miles north of the Tagus estuary—Jeff shoved aside his protractor and stared at it.

Gaines' rather illogical fear of submarines was much greater than his fear of a rocky and steep-to coast. He was skinning that headland, if Jeff was right about that current. Presumably he hoped that U-boat commanders would be little gentlemen about Portuguese territorial waters.

Jeff didn't think they would be. And he respected the hitting power of a headland much more than the hitting power of a submarine.

He sought out Mr. Ball on the bridge. The Old Man, in the weather wing, was staring tensely into the fluffy danger. As second mate Mr. Ball was nominally navigation officer of the ship. In the chartroom he listened with some attention to Jeff Fordyce's remarks and pawed over the chart.

"You think this course will put us ashore?" demanded the Second.

"It'll put us dangerously close to that headland," Jeff said. "If the current happens to be running stronger than usual—"

The Second scowled at the fog. Fogs had no personalities. Mr. Ball didn't understand them.

"It'll be the mate's watch before we close with that point," he said. "Besides, the fog may lift. It don't belong here anyhow."

He pursed his lips. "I'll unload your dope on the Old Man later in my watch."

Jeff got a couple of bottles from the steward and typed out notes, leaving time and position to be filled in later.

The Old Man sent for him. The fog was thicker. It wet a man's face to stand looking forward. The Old Man ordered him to maintain a lookout on the bridge with Mr. Ball. Mr. Upson was in the wheelhouse moodily staring down at the scrap log. Beyond a quick look he ignored Jeff.

Fog in the proximity of a dangerous coast did not explain the uneasiness of the four officers and the rest of the crew. The killing fury was reaching out from that fevered continent to starboard, jangling their nerves. The unseen sea was full of lurking murder. To proclaim their presence with a burst of bellowing steam from the stack at two-minute intervals seemed criminal insanity. But iron routine kept the whistle going nevertheless. Captain Gaines' taut face winced at every blast.

"I hope the Old Man don't try to protect us from the subs so hard he wrecks us," Jeff told himself.

Mr. Ball's watch dragged on toward its end. The Second stared distrustfully ahead and checked the course so often that the quick-fingered quartermaster kept nervously churning the wheel.

Then came the moment when, with a nod to Jeff, Ball approached the Old Man over in the weather wing. He had hardly drawn Gaines attention from the fluff ahead when every man above decks in the *Amaryllis* stood still.

A SOUND that was like a thud against the eardrums had reached the ship. Nobody had trouble in identifying that noise. It was the roar of a distant explosion. Some in that ship had heard it before. A torpedo tearing the vitals out of a ship made a sound like that. It came from seaward.

The Old Man rang down the engines to listen. As the *Amaryllis* lost momentum they heard of a sudden the sharper crack of a single gun opening up.

"Some armed merchantman has stopped a tin fish," said Mr. Ball. "That'll be her gun crew tryin' to hit the sub in the fog."

Nobody denied that. But only seconds later, it seemed, the radio operator came running to the bridge. Jeff heard sketchily what he said—a Britisher reporting to some patrol craft that she was sinking. Her boats were undamaged and a Portuguese fishing smack had come up to stand by.

"They're all right," Sparks said. "They keep tellin' the patrol to go for the sub. They're sore."

Captain Gaines nodded. "Stop the whistle," he said. His voice sounded ragged. "That sub may run toward Portuguese waters—and that means toward us." He paused. Then, in a lower voice he said: "Some of those sub commanders get to be like mad dogs."

He walked over to the engine-room telegraph and rang the engine to full ahead.

"They can hear our screw, Mr. Upson," he muttered. "We must get away from here—fast."

He looked at the Second. "Tell the quartermaster to favor east," he said.

Jeff blinked his eyes. Favor east! That would put her closer than ever to the coast. He stepped toward the Old Man. "Sir!" he stammered in amazement. "The course—"

"Get away from me or I'll have you ironed!" Captain Gaines snapped. "Move!"

Jeff retreated. The Old Man was distraught.

The mate faded discreetly. Mr. Ball, the officer of the watch, swallowed visibly and approached the Old Man. He had not said five words about the course when Captain Gaines wrathfully waved him away. The master's eyes and thoughts were turned seaward. Subs, not courses, engrossed him.

"Your baby's back in your lap," Mr. Ball said to Jeff. "He won't listen to me and he certainly won't listen to you. I'm due off watch in ten minutes. It'll be no hair off my ticket if he piles her up after that."

Jeff grunted. His eyes had been straining ahead but a sudden movement drew them to Gaines. The Old Man had stiffened suddenly. His fingers tensed as if to dig into the bridge rail. His gaze had swiveled from abeam to almost astern. Jeff looked that way, too.

The impalpable fog that had almost blinded them had lifted a trifle from the deep gray sea. For just an instant, in the vague fringe between strained sight and quick fantasy, there was a gray ship, smaller than a destroyer on the port quarter. Then it was not. His hand, reaching out to John Ball's sleeve, had not touched it before the shape was gone. It could only be the British patrol, hunting the sub. He could not tell what secret detectors had brought it this way.

Captain Gaines, though he neither moved nor spoke, had seen the ship astern. He, too, seemed to doubt his eyes since he gave no sign. Jeff wondered if the intensity of the Old Man's gaze had not conjured up that phantom in his own brain.

"Le' go my arm!" said Mr. Ball.

"The limey patrol boat could have showed off our port quarter, John," Jeff said to him.

Startled, Mr. Ball watched.

Long as the Second looked, he saw nothing. Within ninety seconds that slight break in the fog was filled by a swirl of vapor that made their own taffrail a ghostly thing. Jeff's uneasy gaze had already returned to the seas ahead.

"This stuff is breaking up," the Second said without much conviction.

Jeff nodded. "It'll be a fine clear evening about an hour after we strike," he said. "I mean, if that current's as tough as I think it is."

He meditated morosely, long elbows pointed away from each other along the rail.

"If I could just convince the Old Man—"

"Not being a twenty mule team you can't," Mr. Ball said. "He may duck submarines but he stands by his courses."

Jeff Fordyce emitted a startled grunt and straightened up.

"Submarines!" he said. "Submarines!"

He dropped elbows back on the rail again and laid his head on his hands as if the intensity of his thought made it too heavy to lift.

"Submarines!" he muttered again, ignoring Mr. Ball's curious stare.

Of a sudden he straightened up.

"Ball!" he said. "You're going to help me call submarines from the vasty deep."

"I am not," said the Second.

But when Mr. Upson took over at eight bells and Captain Gaines grudgingly released the two juniors Jeff hustled Mr. Ball into his room. He thrust a bottle into Ball's hands, talking rapidly.

"But—"

"Move!" Jeff commanded. "She's too close in for talk! Get to the well deck!"

He forced the reluctant Second away, with the bottle under his jacket.

A FEW minutes later Jeff Fordyce, clutching a bottle of his own, came out on the fiddley deck. His face was wet with sweat and he flinched at the sight of the gray blanket, still thick, into which the ship was plowing. His long legs drove him along the misty deck into plainer sight from the bridge.

Captain Gaines' searching eye fell upon him. The Old Man frowned at the bottle dangling at the end of Jeff's arm.

Jeff ignored him. He turned toward the starboard side of the deck, ahead of the lifeboat. Close to the rail he stopped. Feet wide apart, he swayed his big body back like a bending bow. With a snap of body and arm he sent the bottle hurtling over his head.

For a moment the bottle, flying outward in a high trajectory, was visible. Then the fog swallowed it up.

Almost as the bottle vanished there came through the misty air the imperative tinkle of shattering glass. Out of the fog, plain to the ears on the bridge, it came, the splintering of glass in violent impact against a harder obstacle than water.

Captain Gaines froze. His mouth dropped open. He faced the white veil to starboard, staring as if his will would penetrate to the cause of that utterly unexpected sound. His eyes flickered to Jeff Fordyce.

Jeff opened his mouth, roared incoherently and pointed to starboard.

Captain Gaines eyes raked the fog alongside. It was deadly sure that he must be visualizing the long dark shape of a lurking submarine silently running abeam of his ship. With a start he whirled toward the wheel-house.

"Left!" he shouted at the helmsman. "Hard left! Swing her!"

The quartermaster's hands flailed at the spokes, wrenching the wheel around.

Jeff Fordyce, standing still, gave vent to a low whistle of relief as he felt her swinging from the coast.

The ship, like a frightened creature, seemed to turn in her own length. As she turned away from that unfriendly shore the danger of striking some outlying boulder or ledge grew perversely more imminent in Jeff's mind.

"Come on! Come around! Come around!" he muttered. He marveled at the fear of submarines that kept the Old Man skirting so close to a real peril. A queer thing, fear. He wondered, too, how he had faced so long without wild protest the likelihood of smashing into that headland.

From the forecastle head came a sudden squall from the lookout—a burst of animal noise from a terrified throat.

The lookout, a frightened wraith, was stabbing downward to indicate something dead ahead of the ship. Jeff Fordyce got a glimpse through the mist. It was the low black thing of steel and venom that the Old Man had feared ever since that old war so long ago. But this time it was there.

From the bridge over Jeff's head came the jingle of the telegraph and three quick blasts of the whistle. The ship was backing.

Her straight stem nuzzled and thrust aside the bow of the submarine. Steel plates rumbled and ground together. Tense seconds hung in the air as the two craft ran side by side.

The rudders of both vessels slowly pulled them apart. The U-boat had been paralleling the ship's course on the port beam, very close. The sound of her motors and screw had cleverly been hidden in the louder noises of the freighter's progress.

The *Amaryllis* thrust ahead again. Under the Old Man's commands she presented her stern, no easily hit mark, to the submarine. At top speed she dived on into the fog. The whale-like shape faded out astern.

Mr. Ball arrived at Jeff Fordyce's side, panting and sucking a cut on the back of his hand.

"It seems like all hell let loose the minute you let fly and I cracked my bottle over the starboard side," he said. "How was my timing?"

"Perfect," said Jeff. "I'd have sworn my bottle had hit something in the fog

The quartermaster's hands flailed at the spokes, wrenching the wheel around.

if I hadn't known it was you busting yours. The Old—"

He stopped and jolted Ball with a startled elbow. He flung a hand toward the starboard bow.

The patrol ship was back in sight, rising up in thinning fog with a suddenness that meant her wheel was churning sea water with all her engines had.

"Our three blasts told him two ships were tangling," Jeff said. "Her skipper guessed what the second ship was. He'll get her. The sub won't be in any shape to dive after the kiss we gave her."

The Second nodded, watching the patrol boat shoot past them toward the sub astern. "Your cock-eyed game on the Old Man cert'nly started—"

Again Jeff's elbow hit his chest.

"Look!" said Jeff. "Look at what we missed! Who says now that I don't know currents?"

HIS outstretched arm pointed through the thinning vapor that had revealed the patrol boat to them. There was no doubt of it, now. The fog was lifting. And below that white canopy was appearing a stark headland, close, terribly close. Seas broke white and savage on granite teeth beneath the promontory.

Until they had swung, the *Amaryllis* had been heading full for that high bastion.

"You called your shot," said the Second. "I'm not sure you haven't saved my neck—that's quite a sea rolling in on that stuff."

He glanced up at the bridge and laughed. "Yeh, you rate a medal, kid," he said. "But I got a hunch you ain't gettin' any. The Old Man's lookin' to see what he heard that bottle hit on—an' it ain't there."

Jeff looked up. Captain Gaines, his face no longer gray, had his glasses trained on the seas before the headland, retracing with his eyes the course of the ship.

"You're for it," muttered the Second. "He's onto you."

Jeff laughed. "No brains!" he said. "I'll just tell him there was a sub on each side of him. He'll jump at it."

The thunder of the patrol ship's guns shook Jeff out of his unwinking scrutiny of the Old Man. He turned aft. He could see nothing but the Britisher. Seconds later the sea leaped into mounds of froth and the deeper boom of depth charges drummed in his ears.

"Mr. Fordyce!" It was the Old Man's voice, a rousing bellow. "Kindly come to the bridge."

"Aye, sir!" said Jeff.

"He'll believe your bottle hit a second sub," Mr. Ball muttered. "You know the answer that'll save his face and your job, kid."

Confidently Jeff Fordyce ascended to the bridge. He felt a sort of contemptuous pity for the blundering old superior to whom he must now make a lying submission.

The Old Man was waiting for him in the weather wing. His face was ruddy now and his eyes were steady and quiet, as they always were outside the war zone. Jeff wondered about how much grief the Old Man had taken after that torpedoing almost a generation ago.

Captain Gaines did not speak. He was looking from that high shoulder of Portugal to the disturbed water around the patrol ship far astern. It seemed to

Jeff that his eyes dwelt much longer on the headland.

"Mr. Fordyce," he said at last, "did that bottle you threw hit anything in the fog?"

Jeff Fordyce knew what he was up against. How could the Old Man endure having his ship saved in spite of himself by Jeff's deception and nautical skill? Captain Gaines would get square. Any man would. Self-esteem demanded it.

On the other hand, if Jeff said the bottle had hit a submarine in the fog, by chance, then the saving of the ship was clearly due entirely to the Old Man's own decisive action. He could be generous, then. All Jeff needed was a little tactful renunciation to become Gaines' white-haired boy.

Jeff's eyes, feeling the pressure of the Old Man's steady gaze, darted this way and that, seeking escape from intolerable strain. They fell upon Mr. Upson, over in the leeward wing of the bridge, watching him.

"I know what that lug would do in my spot," he thought.

"Sir," he said stiffly, "I rigged things so you'd hear a breaking bottle. We were too close to the headland."

Captain Gaines nodded. His eyes left Jeff's face. He seemed to be lost in thought.

"The man who helped me didn't know what was going on, sir," Jeff said emphatically.

Captain Gaines' eyes came back to Jeff. "You've overlooked one point in making your decision, Mr. Fordyce," he said dryly. "I am unpleasantly human. It is true that this injury to my self-respect should make me want to get your job and ticket."

He reached out and touched Jeff's shoulder with a finger.

"But, Mr. Fordyce—and this is the point—my self-respect has been suffering for some years because of my persistent and unreasonable fear of submarines. That fear has now given way to a new emotion—" His eyes glowed belligerently. "We've got to rid the seas of these U-boats once more!" growled Captain Gaines—and then he smiled. "You are wrong, Mr. Fordyce, in thinking you are due for annihilation."

The Old Man walked across the bridge to Mr. Upson. The mate seemed to shrink a little as he approached. The captain's voice came clearly up wind to Jeff's ears—

"Mr. Upson, I am now convinced that Mr. Fordyce, who knows so much about currents, would not waste his time throwing into the sea bottles containing anything but scientific data. Is that plain?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Upson.

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BLACK PIGEONS

"Should the enemy come—we will fight to the death!" said the bearded hillman. "But to seek battle beyond our hills—no, Tajen."

THE proud and fierce-eyed fighting men of the Lung-shan hills are truly called the Sons of the Dragon. *Lung*—dragon is a name found everywhere in that rugged district. Their mountains are the Lung-shan—their river is the Lung-ho—their city is Lung-ching-li.

These warrior-hillmen do not burn their scented candles and red paper prayers to the gentle Kwan-Yin; even in times of peace their prayers rise smoking on the altar of the ancient God of Battles—Yo Fei of the Black Face—whose famous shrine stands above the tall whispering pines of the Lung-king.

For century after century the men of the Lung-shan have held their hills inviolate against all invaders—against Tartar, Ming and Manchu—against the preying hordes of *miao* and *hung hu tzu* and *tao ping*.

It is written in the Book of History how, in the ancient days, the dragon-hearted men of the Lung-shan twice hurled back the generals of the great Kublai Khan, so that finally the all-conquering Kublai himself marched against Lung-ching-li.

And after a furious battle which lasted

through three full suns, this Khan of Khans was roused to admiration of the desperate valor of his foes, and offered an honorable peace. As a further token of respect, he presented his jeweled War Sword to the shrine of Yo Fei on the Lung-shan heights.

This shrine still stands in undimmed glory, with the sword of the great Kublai locked away in a carved ebony chest. The key hangs now from the silken girdle of the venerable *bonze* of the temple, Gan-hsi, whose wealth of years is past all counting, and who is reverenced by the hillmen only a little less than the God he serves.

Each morning the old *bonze* comes out into the sunny courtyard of the ancient shrine and spreads grains of rice for the famous Black Pigeons of Yo Fei. And as the somber-hued birds coo and strut, old Gan-hsi's wrinkled face nods and smiles, for these Black Pigeons are the messengers of the War God, and while they remain at the shrine, Yo Fei sleeps, and no danger threatens the lonely peace of the Lung-shan hills.

So runs the legend of the Black Pigeons of Yo Fei—a legend that was already old when the Great Wall was building.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN RICHARD FLANAGAN

COLONEL MONG thought bitterly of that legend as he faced the bearded Captains of the Lung-shan hillmen who had answered his summons to Lung-ching-li, and stood gathered together in

the flagged courtyard of the Governor's *yamen*.

"It is not Yo Fei alone who sleeps," he muttered to himself, "but these heedless men of the hills, who speak more often of Kublai Khan than of our Chiang Kai-shek. To them time is an empty word—they see nothing beyond the rim of their ancient hills. They must be roused to their danger—roused with words that will crash upon their ears like the strokes of a great bronze gong!"

Colonel Mong knew what a tremendous task he faced, for the roots of a legend are buried deep as the roots of a giant oak. Marooned by the centuries in their timeless hills, the clash and clamor of distant war was less loud in the ears of the men of Lung-shan than the whispering pines around the shrine of Yo Fei.

At his shoulder came the measured voice of Tchen Tai, the Governor. "They are all gathered here now, Tajen—the Captains of a Hundred, and the Captains of a Thousand. They await your words. . . . But I fear you waste your breath. There is only one voice can send them beyond the hills to seek battle—the voice of Gan-hsi, the great *bonze* of Yo Fei. If you would journey to the shrine perhaps—"

"I am a fighting man—I will speak to fighting men, and not to an old priest on an ancient hill," Colonel Mong answered sharply.

Tchen Tai gave him an unfathomable look, then bowed politely in his yellow robes of state and held up his hand to the crowd for silence.

Pitch-pine torches snapped and crackled in rusty iron brackets, shedding a ruddy glow over the ancient tiled walls and ponderous medieval gates—over the barbaric motley of the hillmen's quilted capes and strange, fur-edged caps.

And Colonel Mong, looking into the stern, sharp-eyed faces of these Captains of the Lung-shan, whose straight-shooting rifles held the liberty their fathers had won with lance and long-sword, knew that he must pitch his voice against the dragging void of seven centuries of time.

Colonel Mong began to speak—crisply, tersely, without the use of flowery phrase, as befitted a military man dealing with a desperate situation. He told them how, on the far eastern ramparts of the Lung-shan, the small but valiant army of General Yuan was fighting tooth and nail to hold the vital Wan-teh Pass against the pitiless brown hordes of Nippon.

"General Yuan must have help—and quickly!" he said. "The men of Lung-shan are brave and skilled in hill-fighting. With your help, we can hold the Pass. But time is an arrow—your men must hasten down the Lung-ho on sampans, junks, bamboo rafts, on anything that floats. If they do not reach the Wan-teh Pass within ten days, it will be too late!"

And Colonel Mong sketched a grim picture of the havoc and horrors that awaited the Lung-shan country if Wan-teh fell and the mechanized hordes of Nippon poured through the narrow gap in the hills.

Colonel Mong knew that he was talking well. He had had nearly two days in which to choose his words—the forty-odd hours of his jolting journey over the rugged Lung-shan trails in his black, bullet-scarred limousine.

"Men of the Lung-shan! If you have the true Dragon-blood in your veins you will march to meet these Brown Devils!" Colonel Mong cried. "At Wan-teh Pass you will fight the enemy man-to-man—and you will win! But hide like cowards behind your hills until you are hunted out and have to fight against iron devil-machines—and you will lose! *Wah!* I have said my say. The hour of decision is upon you!"

But as Colonel Mong ceased speaking and flicked one swift, appraising glance over the close-packed faces before him, he felt that his desperate plea had failed. The hillmen of the Lung-shan would not march.

He sensed their refusal in the dull silence that followed his words, sensed it in the subtle aura of distrust and disapproval which pervaded the ancient compound. To them he was a stranger, an "outlander," speaking to them with a harsh, outland accent. They stared with hard-eyed curiosity at his immaculate khaki uniform with the gold tabs, at his

polished leather boots and gleaming belt, at his wrist-watch and cigarette.

And suddenly Colonel Mong felt himself to be an impossible anachronism, like the shining black limousine standing there in the medieval, torch-lit courtyard, with its thousand-year-old gates and time-worn tiles, hemmed in by barbaric chieftains whose dress and habits and manner of thought mocked the flight of centuries.

THE bearded captains gathered together in close-knit groups, speaking with each other earnestly but in lowered tones, so that the brittle crackling of the torches was louder than the murmur of their voices.

Then three of the Captains stepped forward and bowed ceremoniously to Tchen Tai and to Colonel Mong, and their spokesman said: "We three have been chosen to ride to the shrine of Lung-king and seek counsel of the Gan-hsi the Great *Bonze*. We go at once, and will return with all speed, so that our answer to you may not be delayed."

Colonel Mong's stiff bow was equally polite, but his lips pressed into a taut line at the unwelcome news. As he had feared, the dead hand of legend still ruled supreme in this forgotten corner of the Dragon-land.

Then servants of the *yamen* brought out three horses—shaggy-haired hill ponies furnished with the clumsy saddles and ancient wooden stirrups which the savage cavalry of Genghis Khan had worn for their headlong conquest of half the world. And a blazing pine torch was handed up to each rider as he galloped out through the gilded gateway.

Colonel Mong paced to and fro as he waited, smoking one cigarette after another, grim-faced and silent, but conscious of the covert, sidelong glances which followed his every motion. He overheard whispered comment about his smooth, clean-shaven cheeks—in the Lung-shan a hairless one could not even be a Captain of Ten, let alone a *Tuchun* of Thousands.

And looking up at the dark slope of the Lung-king, Colonel Mong watched the light of the distant torches moving fitfully among the purple-shadowed pines, likes the golden glint of fireflies.

Within the hour the drumming beat of hoofs announced the swift return of the riders. Colonel Mong dropped his half-smoked cigarette and drew himself up, rigid and expressionless, as the Committee of Three dismounted and presented themselves.

"Tajen, we speak now for all men of the Lung-shan. It is thus: Should the enemy come to our hills—*wah!*—we will fight as we have always fought, to the death! But to seek for battle beyond our hills—no, Tajen, it would draw down on us the anger of Yo Fei."

"You speak with the tongue of a fighting-man," Colonel Mong countered sharply, "but your words are those of a priest. Shall it be said of you that the blood of the Dragon flows no more in the men of the Lung-shan?"

The bearded hillmen stared at him, their faces like carved masks, but their eyes had the angry sparkle of polished jet.

"Tajen, it stands written in the Book of History that the men of Lung-shan are not cowards! The *bonze* Gan-hsi speaks with the wisdom of the hills. We told him of your words of warning, and he sends reply that Yo Fei sleeps, and there is peace on the hills."

"Aye, Yo Fei sleeps!" Colonel Mong spat out through clenched teeth. "Yo Fei has slept these thousand years, and he will still be sleeping when the Brown Devils come pouring down over your precious hills, with their sky-dragons and iron cavalry. If Wan-teh falls to them, the rice that is young and green in your fields will be harvested by the Brown Men. Aye, and they will harvest your wives and your daughters as well! Have I not told you in plain words of the slaughter at Shanghai and the horrors at Nanking? I have seen these things with my own eyes!"

Unmoved, the leader spoke in a level voice. "Should there come an hour of peril to our hills, Yo Fei will awake and send forth his Black Pigeons as a sign and a warning, and the servant of Yo Fei will bring us the sword of Kublai Khan. Then we will rise and march as one man. *Wah!* We have said our say."

"Not so!" Colonel Mong retorted bitterly. "It is only Gan-hsi the old *bonze* who has spoken. Yo Fei will sleep till the sky-dragons wake him with their roaring iron eggs. Too late then! You will stand by, helpless, and see your rice fields blasted into yawning craters, your villages smashed into smoking rubble!"

But the Captain of the Lung-shan bowed in silence, drew their quilted cloaks about them and strode away into the outer darkness, leaving the ancient courtyard to the torches that flickered and died like Colonel Mong's hopes.

"The Black Pigeons of Yo Fei!" he exploded angrily. "Aye, they keep good watch—for the rice that is fed to them every morning! Must we yield up another province to the Brown Devils because of a handful of fat black pigeons! *Tsai!*"

Tchen Tai the Governor buried his hands in his silken sleeves. "Did I not forewarn you, Tajen, that the Captains would not march? They are ruled by legend, yes—but also by fact. In the days of the Square Fists—the Boxers—the men of Lung-shan marched away to fight against the White Devils of the Outland, paying no heed then to the wisdom of Gan-hsi the *bonze*. Aye, they went over the hills by the hundreds and tens of hundreds, and came back but a handful. Now you speak to them of Brown Devils beyond the hills, but this time they will not fail to heed the Black Pigeons of Yo Fei!"

"But not I!" Colonel Mong flamed. "Tomorrow I myself will go to this Lung-king shrine and speak to this ancient priest. There is a wisdom of the hills, aye, but there is also a wisdom beyond the hills."

"*Wah!*" Tchen Tai replied. "But it will be more pleasing to the Great *Bonze*, Tajen, if you go to him as our Captains go, walking on foot and wearing the pale-blue robe of a pilgrim. Gan-hsi is very old, and holds strictly to the ancestral ways, and this, Tajen"—the Governor's gesture swept the Colonel's uniform from visored cap to shining boots—"this is not the dress of your fathers."

"I am a soldier—I go as a soldier!" Colonel Mong declared grimly and strode away.

NEXT morning, as the sun rose like a great golden gong above the eastern rim of the Lung-Shan, Colonel Mong stepped into his gleaming black limousine, and the flat-faced Cantonese behind the wheel guided it through the narrow, dusty streets of the ancient city.

Along the river road they went, where the graceful arch of a camel's-back bridge lay mirrored in the placid surface of the Lung-ho. They passed fishing sampans and lazy garden-boats and river junks with slatted sails and enormous eyes painted on their prows. They passed villages of thatch-roofed farmhouses and crossroad tea-houses with long silken banners gay against the tasseled sweep of green willows.

Then the rice-fields were all about them, an endless checkerboard of neat *padis* where slant-eyed farmers stood bare-legged in the oozing furrows, raising their heads in startled wonder as the black devil-wagon rolled past. And frightened rice-birds darted in snowy flurries against the blue sky, smooth and flawless as Ming porcelain.

Presently the road turned upward along the flank of the Lung-king, a hushed road filtered with pale green shadows cool as running water, where stalwart pines ranged on either side like the pillars of a dim cathedral aisle.

"*Hai!*" the Cantonese chauffeur exclaimed suddenly, making a swift gesture toward the sky as he jammed on the brakes.

Colonel Mong caught silvery glints flashing and winking in the sun, high up against the dazzling blue arch—a squadron of Japanese bombers. A moment later he heard the dull, persistent buzzing of their motors.

"*Wang pu tau!*" he cursed, staring upward through slitted eyes that burned with sudden scorching hate. Of all the forms of death and destruction which the Brown Devils had unleashed upon the Land of the Dragon, Colonel Mong hated most bitterly and most relentlessly those silver-winged buzzards of the sky.

Tchen Tai the Governor had told him that Japanese bombers passed over the Lung-shan almost every day. But the Brown Devils were crafty. They had

dropped no iron eggs upon these hillmen —no, not yet. They would let Yo Fei sleep on undisturbed, until the appointed hour when their deadly plans were fully ripe.

The high-flying squadron soon melted into the blazing blue, heading toward the distant Yang-tze, where another innocent village would find death raining down from the sunny skies. And the men of the Lung-shan paid no heed to these sky-dragons—felt no fear of them, so far away in the blue immensity, so harmless in their lazy droning.

But Colonel Mong visioned the day when those deadly silver birds would pause in their flight to circle above the placid Lung-ho, and the peaceful hills would echo to soul-shattering roars, and the slaughtered dead would lie in windrows along the choked roads as the screaming sky-fighters swooped low, spraying bullets like a driving rain—

"Road make finish here, Illustrious!"

The chauffeur's voice recalled Colonel Mong to the present. He got out of the car, staring up at the long flight of steps leading to the shrine—a crude staircase formed of rough, half-buried logs.

Briskly Colonel Mong made the steep ascent, through a primal hush that must have existed on the world's first morning. Then the wind stirred over the hills, and the stately pines swayed and clashed with a sound like the deep bourdon note of an organ.

Colonel Mong halted to listen to that long, majestic note, stood drawing in deep breaths of the clean, pine-scented air. Then the song of the wind-swept pines dissolved into a curling swish like the foaming of surf on a vast and lonely beach.

The log steps ended at a carved *pai-lou* and a little gate-house where a grave-faced *mafoo,* with the insignia of the God stitched upon the shoulder of his silk *shaam,* bowed low and gave him welcome.

"I am not a pilgrim," Colonel Mong announced crisply. "I come to have speech with the *bonze* Gan-hsi."

"Tajen, he shall be informed of your gracious presence," the *mafoo* replied, pointing out the path to the temple, a low building with scrolled eaves and black-tiled roof, standing in a nest of the sacred gingko trees.

And as Colonel Mong entered the time-worn courtyard, his ears were greeted by the throaty "*kuroo-kuroo-kuroo*" of the famous Black Pigeons, proudly strutting to and fro in search of grains of rice.

Plump and lazy as mandarin pigs, they waddled aside without haste as the tight-lipped Colonel went on past them and entered the cool twilight of the House of Yo Fei, its hushed stillness eternally haunted by the spicy fragrance of incense and prayer-candle and joss-stick.

The Black-Faced God himself stood erect and frowning in a carved alcove, with rows of jade ceremonial bowls at his feet. A small gong with its striker on a chain hung beside the alcove, so that worshippers might ensure the God's attention to their prayers.

There was no slightest hint of emotion in Colonel Mong's black eyes as he peered upward at the towering figure of the ancient God. His was the face of the New China, gazing upon this relic of an outworn day, respectfully, but quite unmoved. Yo Fei was dead—dead as the Khan of Khans, and just as powerless to save the Land of the Dragon from its ravenous foe.

COLONEL MONG swung about quickly at the pad-pad of slippered feet. It was Gan-hsi the Great *Bonze*—a frail man, silver-bearded and incredibly old —old as this hill of the whispering pines, the sacred gingko trees.

"Honor to the God and to the servant of the God," Colonel Mong said in greeting, and lifted the wrinkled hand of Gan-hsi to his forehead as a gesture of respect.

"The Three Blessings upon you, my son," Gan-hsi replied in a gentle voice. His faded eyes peered curiously at the Colonel's uniform. "You have come from a far distance?"

"From beyond the hills," Colonel Mong replied. "I came to the Lung-shan to plead with the Captains for help in the fighting at Wan-teh Pass. But they will not march—no, not even to save their own hills from the gathering storm

of fire and blood, because you have told them that Yo Fei sleeps, and there is no danger. It is concerning that matter I would speak with you."

"*Wah!* Let us speak, then," said Gan-hsi politely, and led the way to his private quarters, a bare-walled room containing only a table, a chair, and a simple sleeping *k'ang* of bamboo. But there was a great round moon-window with a magnificent view of the Lung-shan hills.

And it was here that Colonel Mong marshaled all his eloquence in a final impassioned plea for help. In crisp, stark phrases he told of what had already befallen in the hill campaign—of battle and retreat—the desperate plight of General Yuan's men—of what fate lay in store for the Lung-shan if Wan-teh Pass fell to the enemy.

But even as he spoke, Gan-hsi shook his head gently. "Are you a Lord of Destiny, my son, that you can read so clearly the shape of things to come? Were your years ninety-and-nine, you still could not say whether Tomorrow will be ruled by Friend or Foe. . . Last night the Captains of Lung-shan came to me and asked a question, and I gave them truthful answer: Yo Fei sleeps."

"Aye, Yo Fei sleeps," Colonel Mong repeated bitterly, "but the Brown Devils do not. Let me point out the danger by this map of the hills—"

And Colonel Mong spread a map of the Lung-shan, showing how Wan-teh Pass was like a keyhole that would open the door to a whole province. With the headlong eloquence of desperation he reasoned, pleaded — until suddenly he realized with an angry shock that the old *bonze* was not even listening.

Gan-hsi was gazing out through the moon-window at the smoky blue of the distant hills, remote and withdrawn.

The map curled and crackled in Colonel Mong's clenched hand. "You, too, have only ears of the deaf for the warning I bring! Yo Fei sleeps, you say, and there is peace on the hills. Aye, but there shall come a day of rude awakening—and Death at its heels, such Death as your God of Battles has never seen!"

The *bonze's* drooping lids snapped open, and for a moment his faded eyes flamed into strength again.

"My son, I am an old man, heavy with years. I was here in this place, the servant of Yo Fei, before you were born. I know little of this larger world of yours, except that it is a place of evil strivings. . . . Look out upon this land beloved of Yo Fei. See how the clean river flows and the young rice stands green in the fields. Look up at the stainless blue of our skies—listen to the song of the wind in the pine-trees. No foe has ever won his way across these hills—no, not even the mighty Kublai Khan. When there is danger to the Lung-shan, Yo Fei will rouse himself and strike—strike as the gods strike, so that the enemy will not even know whence the swift blow came!"

The old man raised his hand in a commanding gesture. "Have faith in the power of Yo Fei, my son. This is his land, and he will protect it. The gods of our ancestors are not dead. They have only withdrawn themselves a little because of the foolish laughter of those who mock at the ancient faiths—"

And for a moment Colonel Mong succumbed to the spell of that gentle voice, merged with the singing wind; to the timeless hush of the hills that soothed away all turmoil of soul like a healing drug. For a moment Colonel Mong believed in the power of Yo Fei—believed with the simple, unquestioning faith of the old *bonze* himself that the Brown Men of Nippon could never harry this sacred soil.

"Go now, my son." The voice of Gan-hsi seemed to come from a great distance. "I can speak no more. It is the hour of prayer."

And Colonel Mong found himself moving toward the open door, his keen-edged purpose no more now than a broken sword in his hand. The gentle voice seemed to walk beside him, saying: "Yo Fei sleeps, but the Black Pigeons still keep watch, and no foe shall cross our hills."

Then the spell broke and dissolved, and Colonel Mong stood alone on the broad steps of the temple, blinking against the sudden glare of the sun. The *bonze* had vanished, but the Black Pigeons filled the courtyard with their throaty calls.

For an instant Colonel Mong's eyes

flashed at them with the same flaming hatred with which he had watched the silver-winged bombers sailing overhead, and his hand touched the butt of his pistol.

"No—no, it would be useless," he muttered. "One cannot destroy a legend with bullets."

THUS Colonel Mong left the House of Yo Fei, but the ancient shrine was destined to have yet other visitors that day, although Gan-hsi saw them not, for these were strangers who came creeping stealthily in the hour of high moon.

There were five of them, the Captain and crew of a Japanese bomber which had fallen behind its squadron on the return flight and finally crashed on the Lung-shan. Like five furtive shadows they slipped through gingko grove, staring across the moonlit space at the black-roofed House of Yo Fei.

"It is a temple," declared one named Sadakuro, and slipping off his shoes, he crept forward warily to reconnoiter.

The others dropped to the ground, footsore and weary from their long struggle across the rugged flanks of the hills, for Captain Kamichi had sustained a broken leg and had to be carried in a hammock fashioned from their parachute cloth.

After a little while Sadakuro came creeping back. "There are only two old men—a priest and his servant. They are preparing for sleep. I saw a little room where food is kept, and there are no locks on the doors—"

"Food!" one of the Brown Men exclaimed exultantly. "*Banzai!*"

And while Sadakuro kept watch on the temple, the others made a crude camp in a rocky hollow, and built a tiny fire to warm themselves against the chill night air.

When the lights of the temple had winked out, and Gan-hsi and the *mafoo* lay asleep, two shadows crept silently into the dark courtyard and edged their way up the broad stone steps until a

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sudden low sound froze them into immobility—a startled "*kuroo!*"

Sadakuro the Brown Man laughed softly in the darkness. "It is only pigeons!" he whispered to his companion. "The temple pigeons are roosting here on the beams above the door. See—they are quite tame. They will give no warning of our presence."

So the two Brown Men stole the food they needed from the House of Yo Fei and crept back to their hidden campfire. With the first golden streak of dawn they carefully covered the ashes of their fire and resumed their flight over the hills.

"Not so quickly!" the injured Captain Kamichi snapped. "You jolt too much."

"It cannot be helped, Captain," Sadakuro answered. "The paths are steep and we must travel with all speed. Do you not hear the sound of drums in the valley? If they have found the wreckage of our plane, they will soon be searching the hills for us."

"But they will never catch us now!" another one boasted. "We have rested and slept and eaten. *Hoi!* What a feast that was last night by our fire—tea and rice and beans, and those fat black pigeons Sadakuro brought back from the temple. Ah, but they were good to eat! So plump and tasty!"

"A gift from the gods!" Sadakuro said, smiling proudly.

So the five little Brown Men pushed on at a faster pace, while behind them the valley of the Lung-ho seethed and boiled to the clamor of gong and drum, and the hill-roads smoked to the galloping beat of horsemen.

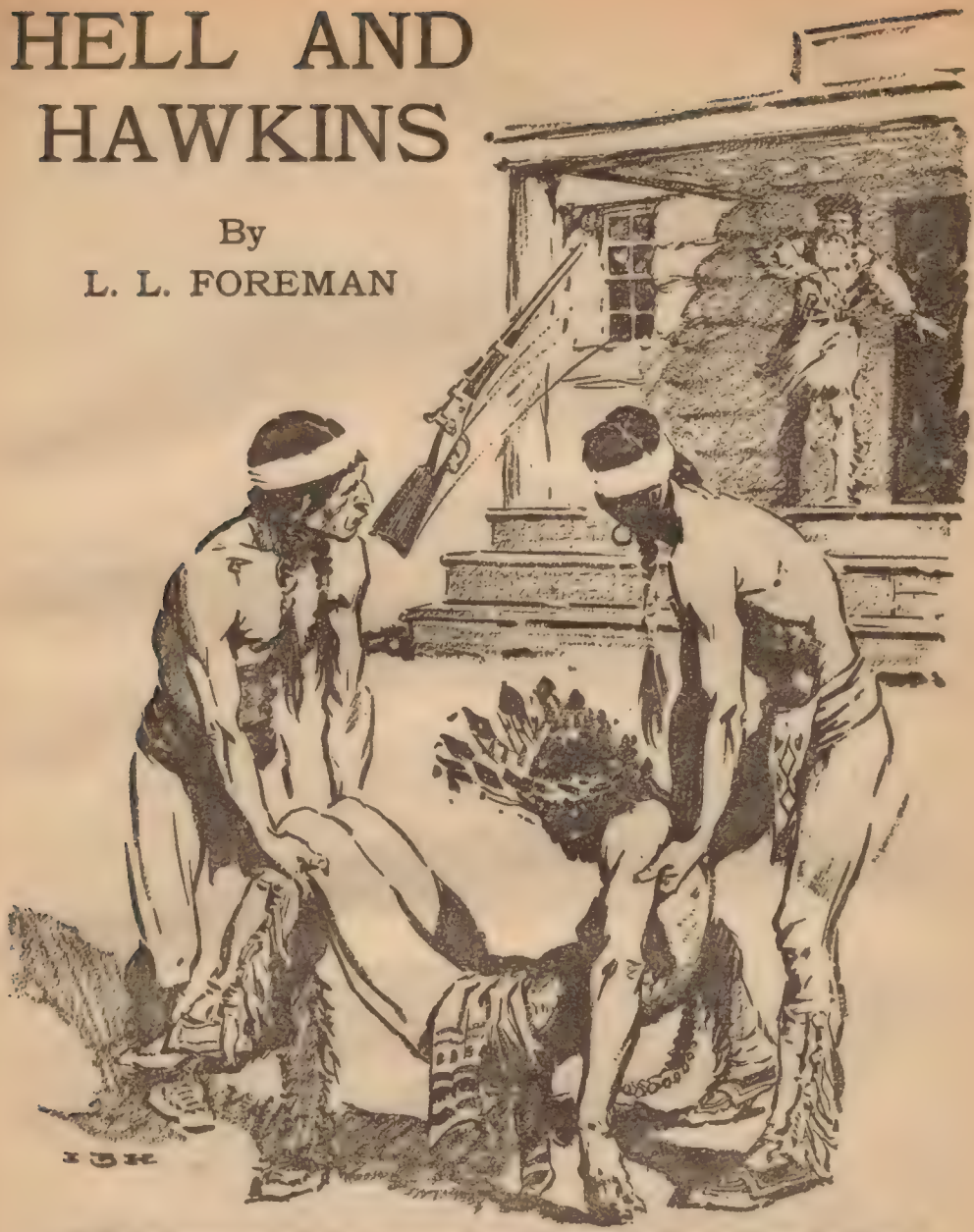
For flaming news was spreading like wildfire over the Lung-shan hills, and Tchen Tai the Governor came rushing into the room where the grim-faced Colonel Mong was preparing to take the long road back to Wan-teh Pass.

"Tajen! There is news—Number One news! The Black Pigeons have taken flight from the temple of Yo Fei! Aye! This morning every single one was gone, and Gan-hsi has sent the War Sword of Kublai Khan down into the city as a sign and a token that Yo Fei sleeps no more! Now the men of our hills will march!"

HELL AND HAWKINS

By

L. L. FOREMAN



A flirt of one arm, and the stranger sent the empty rifle whirling after them.

SOMETHING was wrong down in the Pueblo village. Old Jebo came into the Elkhorn Trading Post and nearly collided with Johnny Free, the youthful assistant trader, just inside the doorway. Johnny was going out to see what was the trouble, but Jebo was one of those running from it.

Jebo had been around white men a lot, and he spoke English pretty well for a Pueblo Indian. He blurted out: "If something not done quick 'bout that man La Hache and his damn Mescalero Apaches, gonna be big trouble round here. Don't you go out there, Johnny. You not Uncle Joe. Uncle Joe was man and know how, but you just young Johnny. They jump on you damn quick!"

Jebo shouldn't have said that, and

wouldn't have if he'd had any proper respect for Johnny, who wasn't so young that he couldn't run the trading post alone in a pinch. Johnny flushed, but the reminder was enough to call up in him a hatedly familiar sense of insufficiency and self-doubt. Uncle Joe Ketch had managed the trading post for years, and had generally been able to command any situation that arose. He had died quietly in his sleep three weeks ago, leaving Johnny to manage alone. The great Elkhorn Trading Company expected its employees to carry on capably under all conditions, and Johnny had begun to take on a certain dignity of accomplishment during the past three weeks. But Jebo's remark poked a big hole in Johnny's new-found pride and confidence.

Somebody began shooting off a gun in the village, a hundred yards from the trading post, and howling the mad dog-howls of an Apache who had got hold of too much bad whiskey. Terrorizing the peaceful Pueblo people, who now would be barricading the doors of their adobe houses in panic. Pueblos had been the victims of savage Apache raids since long before the coming of the white man, and the Pueblo people had long learned to take cover when that howl broke upon them.

"Is Red Hand," mumbled Jebo with a shiver, his black eyes big with ingrained fear of the ancient enemy. "Is drunk. All Apaches drunk . . . La Hache drunk, too."

Johnny bit his lip, retiring slowly behind the plain board counter. Jules La Hache, halfbreed who roved the New Mexico territory and far afield with his wild band of Mescalero Apache hunters, called himself an independent fur trader. He was something of a legendary figure, rarely visiting the settlements, a man of secret mind and gross habits, suspected of much and credited with nothing good. Yesterday he and his Apache entourage had ridden in suddenly from nobody knew where, to buy powder and supplies, and made camp on the riverbank on the other side from the village.

And now, as could have been expected, La Hache and his red renegades were whooping it up with liquor and gunsmoke, raising blazes with the nerves of the Pueblos. Doing Johnny's nerves no good, too, and Johnny had to admit it to himself. Every hair on Johnny's body stood up straight at each crazy howl. Life in a trading store, selling tea and stuff to quiet-mannered Pueblo Indians, was poor practice to equip him to deal with violent Apache temperament. He hoped Red Hand and the others would soon go and sleep it off somewhere.

THE flat explosion of the gun ended, but howling and drink-loosened laughter still floated up from across the river. By and by a weaving formation of shadows fell across the doorstep of the trading store. One by one, three Apache men entered. They stepped in the peculiar way of Indians aglow with drunken mischief, with exaggerated softness and a kind of mimic caution that was rankly insulting in its clowning mockery. One had donned war bonnet and paint. He was Red Hand, known as a hostile and a raider along the Santa Fe trail, a warrior who had counted his coups among the smoking ashes of more than one wagon train. All three were stripped almost naked, and their dark bodies shone with the sweat of hot sunshine, bad whiskey, and wild dancing through the empty plaza of the village.

Red Hand carried a rifle and wore a leather bandoleer heavy with cartridges. He grinned blearily as Jebo dove behind the counter, and made a mock motion toward him. His black and bloodshot eyes shifted to rest on Johnny, at first in blinking deliberation, finally with something like contempt.

"Candy," he growled. "Red Hand want candy." He lurched to the counter, knocked off the lid of the candy barrel so that it fell with a clatter to the floor, and thrust in his dirty hand. His two satellites crowded up to him, snatching the sticks of striped sweets as he drew them out. One of them, with a fistful, got his eye on a pile of fine Navajo blankets. He jerked at one, upsetting the neat stack, and held it up to admire.

Johnny went white with fury. The drunken Apaches had sized him up and

figured him safe enough to ride. He lacked that calm assurance, that formidable dignity of confidence that grew out of experience. The Apaches, keen judges of men, were quick to discern that.

Johnny said tightly: "How many candy sticks you buying? Say, you . . . that blanket'll cost you twenty skins." He tried to hold his voice down to a dead level, in the manner of Uncle Joe Ketch, but they detected a new sign of unsureness in his tone.

They grinned openly at him, insolent and taunting. Red Hand spat out bits of candy, kicked the tumbled blankets across the floor, and came boldly around behind the counter, poking into whatever caught his fancy on the shelves. His rifle trailed loosely in his grip, and that too was an insult, the careless way he carried it, as if no sort of danger threatened him here.

Jebo, shuddering before the hideously painted face, retreated, pressing backward against Johnny, and Johnny had to retreat with him, for the space back of the counter was narrow. Johnny called out, "Damn you, quit that . . . get out o' here!" But his voice pinched off into a high note, and the deep bass of grunting Apache laughter answered him.

Jebo's terror was contagious. Johnny groped about, half hypnotized by the three pairs of glittering black eyes, and his hand touched a scale weight lying on the counter. Hardly with conscious intent, but more from the instinct of earlier boyhood, he picked it up and hurled it at Red Hand. The iron pellet struck just below the foreband of the feathered war-bonnet, and tall Red Hand uttered a surprised grunt and went down on his back.

"That," spoke up somebody from the doorway, "was fairish neat. Better take his gun now."

IT WAS a dry and matter-of-fact voice, and belonged to a stranger who matched it, a leathery man of medium size but big presence. He was clad in fringed elk-skins that bore the blackened stains and burns of many camp-fires, this stranger, and he wore a long skinning knife in his belt. A mountain man, hunter and trapper. His faded blue eyes looked tired and quiet, but it was the still and frozen quietness of a man who had left his excitable years far behind him.

The stranger ran a cold stare over the two standing Apaches, and they seemed to lose much of their springy boldness. He looked at Johnny again and repeated, "Better take his rifle . . . son."

He added the "son" after a good look at Johnny's face, his dry voice a shade dryer. Johnny stooped and picked up Red Hand's rifle, and laid it on the counter. The stranger motioned with curt eloquence to the two Apaches. They lifted Red Hand and carried him out. There was something almost miraculous in the way this man, not nearly as big as Johnny, off-handedly quelled the pair with only a gesture and a look. Johnny had seen the same sort of thing done before, but usually to drunken Pueblo men, never to plains Indians, and the secret power that enabled certain men to do it was a wonder to him.

At the door the two Apaches paused to cast black looks backward and do some muttering. Probably it was meant only as some slight salvage of their broken pride, but the stranger took prompt action to forestall any more of it. He moved with astonishing lightness, plucked Red Hand's rifle from the counter, and the rifle exploded a short and shattering series of reports. Four holes pitted the wooden doorstep, neatly in a row. The Apaches fled with their senseless burden, knocking over a rack of ax-handles on their way. A flirt of one arm, and the stranger sent the empty rifle whirling after them.

"Injuns," he murmured patiently, "can be downright aggravatin'."

He looked again at Johnny for a long and speculative moment, and he could have been scanning a long and forgotten bit of topography, conjuring up old recollections about it. "I'm wondering could you be kin to Big John Free?" he said finally, and added, "Rest his soul."

Pride and pleasure warmed Johnny. He nodded, attempting to be casual. "His son—Johnny."

"Do say," drawled the mountain man. "Well, don't be too modest about it. Big John was consid'rable of a man. You favor him—rusty hair, big mouth, an' most as tall as he was when I knew him. Him an' me hunted the Bayou Salade sev'ral years, in between dodgin' Injuns an' fightin' the *dons* at San Jacinto. My name's Mackinaw Cardiff."

They gravely shook hands over the counter. "I'm mighty proud to know you, Mr. Cardiff," acknowledged Johnny, and the mention of his famous fighting father, by this man who had known him, brought back that painful sense of personal littleness. He could never, he felt, live up to the name and great reputation of Big John Free, a name that always brought a warm glint to the eyes of old-timers, old Indian fighters, and all mountain men. The knowledge of his lack made him stiff and hesitant, and Mackinaw Cardiff, accustomed to forthright ways, cocked an eyebrow strangely at him.

"I guess, John," said the mountain man carefully, "you missed catching my first name. It ain't nothin' like 'Mister.'" He changed the subject abruptly. "There's my bunch pullin' up outside. We're headin' up over the High Jemez for beaver, but we turned consid'rable off our route. I came on ahead to see the trade-store keeper about something. The boys'll be glad to see the son o' Big John. Most of 'em knew him."

The long knife twitched briefly and Johnny read in La Hache's eyes no coming surrender. . .

ILLUSTRATED BY I. B. HAZELTON

LATER, with the store full of lean and silent mountain men, Johnny found himself explaining to Mackinaw Cardiff that he was acting manager of the trading post.

"You see," Johnny went on frankly, "my mother was related to J. D.—that is, Mr. J. D. Blaskell, who owns the Elkhorn Trading Company and all these trading posts and things. When J. D. heard about my dad's death, he took me in. Sent me to school and then gave me a job. Last time he was here on his reg'lar inspection trip, J. D. good as said he might put me in charge here after Uncle Joe Ketch got too old."

Neither Cardiff nor the other mountain men made any comment. They stood around smoking their pipes, wrapped in the elemental dignity of their kind, unreadable and reticent as Indian chiefs, and most of them as dark of skin.

A very tough and virile breed of men, these fighters and wanderers, self-sufficient and untamed, wearing their hair long as a sardonic dare to the prowling red scalp-hunters to come and get it. Restless rovers of the unknown wilderness, liking danger for its own sake, descending upon a town like an explosion when they had gold to throw away, and departing just as suddenly. They could be found always where life was fastest, hardest, most zestful.

There was one among them, an oldster whom they called Old Rock, who sat on a tobacco box and gently rubbed his knees. He was gray with weariness, but ever and anon he straightened his sagging shoulders and peered belligerently about at the others. By the wall beside him he had carefully propped his gun, a battered old Hawkins rifle. The new breech-loading repeaters were being much favored by most hunters, and the Indians would have nothing less when they went trading for a new weapon, but old-timers still clung doggedly to their trusted Hawkins.

Old Rock's brooding glance caught on Johnny, and remained on him for awhile. It was a cheerless and disillusioned glance, the kind of glance with which a man might contemplate a knock-kneed colt where he had expected a thoroughbred racer, and Johnny got very ill at ease.

"Like J. D. said, managing a store for the Company would be a big opportunity for a young fellow like me, who —who—well—" Johnny's voice trailed off, the continued silence of the mountain men hammering at him. "I'm expectin' J. D. here any time, maybe today," he finished lamely.

Mackinaw Cardiff finally cleared his throat and spoke. "I reckon that's right," he allowed, but he looked at the others, not at Johnny. "Runnin' a store for these here Pueblo farmers sounds like a nice easy berth. I bet Uncle Joe Ketch liked it. Just the job for a man when he's slowed down an' can't make out to follow bad trails no more. Joe was a right good hand in his time, till he broke his knee up along the Green River. I wintered with him that year."

A bearded hunter, squatting on his moccasined heels, looked aside at Old Rock. "Mebbe you might git y'self that kinda job somewhere," he suggested.

Old Rock grunted contemptuously and left off rubbing his knees. "Hell, I ain't that played-out an' useless yet!"

That sank in. Johnny was wrestling with all that it implied, when Cardiff spoke again. "I might's well get down to the business that brought us here off our route," he said. "Old Rock, there, is ready to quit—"

"I ain't!" snapped Old Rock. "I'm still as good as any here an' I'll fight the man says I ain't!"

MACKINAW CARDIFF politely let the ancient finish, took a slow pull at his pipe, and went on calmly. "I didn't know Joe Ketch was dead. We kinda figgered to leave Old Rock here with him, snug an' comf, an' pick him up next spring. He needs to sit an' let the sun soak the rheumaticks out o' his joints, an' take it easy a spell." He gazed expectantly at Johnny.

The first thing that Johnny thought of was the Company, which was natural enough but unfortunate. He had never been able to feel that anything actually belonged to him, to keep or to give

away. Everything belonged to the Company. "There's a Company rule against strangers staying at the post," he blurted.

He realized at once that he had made a ghastly blunder. To refuse hospitality, no matter what the conditions, was a thing beyond the ken of men like these. It could not be understood by them. Even the cussed Injuns would share sleeping robe and food with the stranger, though they might slip a noiseless arrow between his ribs next day after he left their camp.

In the dead silence that followed, Johnny wet his lips and stammered, "But if J. D. gets here today it'll be all right. I'll talk to him about it, and —and—"

He caught Old Rock's eye on him, somber and jaundiced, and heard Old Rock mumble something about Big John Free turning over in his grave. Johnny flinched. His eyes hunted away for something that wouldn't throw silent scorn at him, and they chanced to light on the old Hawkins rifle. Memory took a long and erratic jump, and suddenly he recalled a rifle just like that, a buffalo head crudely carved into the stock and the cracked butt bound with copper wire. The recollection dragged in a confusion of pictures that swiftly cleared, wtih his father dominating the whole scene, and for a moment Johnny was back in an early life that he had almost forgotten.

He had been just a kid boy, a child, and it happened after his mother died. There had been much that he did not understand, much sullen thunder of firearms, of crackling grass burning in waves, and desperate riding. His father held him before him on the jolting pommel, the great brown arm steady and steel-hard. Their horse gave out, and they tramped a long way through a black night of many strange noises. In the morning they were joined by a man who had been in the fighting the night before, a short-legged man with all his hair burned off, and they lay watching an Indian camp ahead.

There was a spring near the camp, and feathered figures crouched about a fire that gave off little smoke. "Comanches," said Big John quietly. "Small war-party."

He examined his rifle with minute care, and then his new Colt's pistol. "Water an' horses—a man can't live without 'em in this country." His hand touched Johnny's small and wriggling body. "Hunker down an' lay still, son. Rocky, is that gun o' yours loaded?"

"Loaded an' set to pop."

"Then let's give 'em hell an' Hawkins!"

After the yells and the firing, they rode Indian ponies away from that warrior camp, with food packed in skin bags and water in plugged gourds. Later on, the short-legged man patched up very cleverly the bloody hole in Big John's side.

THAT was the kind of man Big John Free had been; no more violent than necessary, but terrible when he had to be, and known as a cool hand in a tight pinch. He had aimed to raise his boy along the same lines, and made a fair start at it, but death caught up with him too soon for his plans, and life turned Little John into tamer paths.

The oppressive silence in the store ran on until Johnny broke it. Johnny pointed at Old Rock, and he said slowly: "Why, sure—you're him. You're Rocky Hornaday, an' there's my dad's rifle. His Hawkins gun. Don't you remember—that night they fired the grass, an' next morning him an' you jumped the Comanche camp?"

Old Rock's eyes lighted up, and all the mountain men regarded Johnny as if there might be something good left in him, after all. They were charitable men, tolerant and generous, none of them prone to condemn anybody too quickly. Johnny sensed that, and knew that his father must have been like that, though his memory of Big John was too meager to afford much proof of anything. He wished Big John were still alive, so that he could have known him better, yet it had been years since that wish had pricked him so definitely as it did now. A sense of loss and loneliness rose in him, as acute and heavy as on the day long ago when J. D. Blaskell

marched him into a grim and shabby boarding school and left him there. A new life had begun that day, and a child that was looked on as a young savage had been reshaped into something less independent.

Cardiff sucked twice at his pipe, though it had gone out, and squinted thoughtfully at Johnny. "Y'know, John," he said, "I kinda had it figgered you might like to join my party. It occurred to me right away when you told me who you was."

Those were simple words, but Kit Carson himself could have dashed up and invited Johnny to ride along as his saddle-mate on one more trip over the Rockies, and Johnny would have felt much the same as he did now—overwhelmed by too much honor. Only well-tried and experienced men—men of reputation and proved worth—ever received that sort of invitation from mountain men. Hunting and trapping parties were closely knit units, enjoying hard-won privileges, each member as necessary and depended upon as the finger of a hand. A single error, and disaster could smash the whole party. Winter snows covered more than one party that allowed its meat to spoil, starvation had stalked others who were careless with their powder, and from the bridles of Indian ponies dangled the scalps of men who had slept at the wrong time.

Johnny just didn't know what to say. Cardiff's words had been more in the nature of a remark than a direct offer, but that was the way of mountain men and you had to know them to understand them. Johnny's modesty held him back from coming right out and snatching at the chance. On the other hand, he didn't want them to think he was hesitating about accepting.

While he balanced, groping for the right thing to say, wheels crunched to a halt outside the store, and J. D. Blaskell made a spectacular entrance.

AN IMPORTANT and impatient man of business was J. D., and when hungry or tired he was apt to be short of temper. Today he had driven twenty miles in an open buckboard and eaten nothing for six hours, two factors which summed up to hardship according to his definition of the term. His eye was critical, trained to pick out flaws and faults in the operation of his many trading posts.

In this particular case, his sharp training was not put to any great strain. He tripped over the ax-handles strewn near the doorway, first thing, for he was a hurrying kind of man, and spilled himself—frocked coat, beaver hat, account books and all—right at the feet of the mountain men. The mountain men eyed him, owlishly solemn, and one of them casually yanked him upright with a powerful arm, remarking kindly that it did beat all, the way those stiff store-bought boots could trip a feller.

J. D. clapped on his beaver hat, aimed a kick at the scattered ax-handles, and muttered a few words that had nothing to do with thanks for the lift. His flustered stare ranged over the deceptively solemn crowd, and lighted upon Johnny and the wrecked pile of bright Navajo blankets at about the same time. He had not seen Johnny since his last annual visit of inspection, but a bitter reprimand began shaping up as his first greeting. However, he then sighted the broken bits of candy littering the floor, and the messed-up shelves where Red Hand had got in his work, and that struck him utterly speechless for the moment.

Johnny was aware of Cardiff's amused eyes and the silent laughter of the mountain men. To the mountain men, living large lives, the trifling mishap and J. D.'s petty anger were merely comic. All self-important men were funny to them. But to Johnny, who had automatically fallen back into the narrow viewpoint of his long environment, the thing was shatteringly serious. It called for humble apologies and frantic smoothing of ruffled royal feathers.

"I—I'm sure sorry, Mr. Blaskell," he began.

J. D.'s rather full face had grown very red, and his heavy lower lip stuck out. He lit into Johnny with every verbal claw at his command, heedless of the audience. Was there, he demanded, no

sense of responsibility in Johnny, nor even clealiness or decency? Was Johnny not aware that the Elkhorn Trading Company strictly required that all posts be kept neat, clean and businesslike? What did Johnny mean by allowing this store to become a filthy hangout for loafers?

"This is outrageous!" he almost shouted, and had to pause for breath, and that gave Johnny a chance to get in a stumbling defense. The mountain men were quietly filing out, disgusted, all except Mackinaw Cardiff and Old Rock. Old Rock, having sat down, needed some little time to make his knees behave so he could get up again.

"It—it was some Injuns did it, Mr. Blaskell," stammered Johnny. "They came in an' made trouble, an' we had to run 'em out."

J. D. really blew up then. He launched into his favorite thesis regarding Indians. They were mental children, he declared, but they also were customers of the Elkhorn Trading Company. They had to be treated with tolerant understanding, never with violence. There was a standing rule of the Company that never, by word or deed, should any of these simple children of nature be antagonized. Brute force was never necessary. Besides, it hurt business.

JOHNNY tried to explain that these had not been Pueblo Indians, peaceful and friendly, living in comfortable adobe houses, working their fields six days of the week and going to church on Sundays. No, these had been Apaches —and Mescalero Apaches, at that, hawk-fierce and predatory, working for a renegade half-white and lifting scalps any time they could, the devils.

But J. D. waved that aside. He lived away back in St. Louis, came west by the speediest routes once a year to make his annual tour of inspection, and considered himself an authority on Indians because he knew the Pueblos. His father, now dead, had founded the Company. "Indians are Indians, all very much alike and all springing from the same main stock, regardless of present tribal distinctions," he stated flatly, and Old Rock peered at him as if he were crazy.

Mackinaw Cardiff tamped a fresh load into his pipe and lighted it. His smoke reeked strongly of perique, kinnikinick, dark Virginia leaf and a little bull-hair, tingling to sensitive nostrils accustomed mostly to mild Havanas, and J. D. sneezed when the black briar got going full blast. J. D. frowned around for the source of the new offense, and Cardiff looked him in the eye.

"I reckon," said Cardiff, "you're the man I want to see. This here is Rock Hornaday. He's got sand in his joints an' can't make it with us this year. We figger he could put up here for a spell. That all right with you?"

J. D. began quoting Company rules and pointed out coldly that this trading post was not a charitable institution. In the midst of it, Mackinaw Cardiff put in a few brittle words to the effect that Old Rock's board and room would be paid for.

"In advance," he added, and gazed steadily at J. D. in much the same manner that he had pinned a stare on the two Apaches. So J. D. coughed and conceded that it might be arranged, and while that was being said, Cardiff slammed a handful of gold coins on the counter.

Cardiff then turned and looked at Johnny. His eyes did not warm. "Old Rock won't be needin' his pony an' outfit, an' I kinda had it figgered you could use it," he remarked, and paused. Then he added deliberately, "But you got a job that seems to suit you. I can see you wouldn't be int'rested in something diff'rent."

He walked out, with a good-bye to Old Rock, and a cool nod for J. D. and Johnny. Pretty soon Johnny heard the mountain men pulling out, calling back gruff farewells to Old Rock, and when the steady beat of hoofs died off up the trail he felt lost and sick of himself.

J. D. spent the rest of the daylight going over the stock and checking suspiciously for shortages. He would stay the night and wind up his inspection in the morning, he announced.

"Tomorrow I shall send out to one of the big posts for an older and more capable man to come and take charge here," he added curtly. "I'll run this post until the new man arrives. You can get yourself ready to return with me to St. Louis. I'll make some sort of small job for you in the main office there. You hear me?"

"YES, SIR," muttered Johnny, but his thoughts followed the mountain men. They were gone on their long trek to the hunting grounds, a hard and toughened clan of free men, independent as wild stallions on a mountain top. Such men were kings—kings in buckskin—and the likes of them had no use for a tall youngster miserably plodding along a safe and humdrum road. Johnny sighed, lighted the oil lamps, and went into the living quarters at the rear to get supper ready, while J. D. counted Cardiff's gold and entered the sum in his account books.

After supper, J. D. went back into the lighted store and sold a big brass kettle to a Pueblo woman who had come in to buy a tin pan. Johnny, clearing up the table in the rear, heard J. D.'s persuasive salesmanship, and wondered what would happen when the woman got home with the expensive kettle. Her man would likely bang her over the head with it and bring it back, demanding cancellation of the sale. Johnny slipped out the back, took the kettle away from the hypnotized woman for her own sake, and she told him the La Hache party was making ready to leave tonight.

Johnny returned to the kitchen to find Old Rock scraping the table things, and they washed the dishes together in profound silence. Old Rock was aloof and unapproachable, and he took no notice when a noisy band of horsemen drew up in front of the store. The horsemen dismounted and crowded into the store, and from then on J. D. showed what a salesman he was. He sold practically everything in sight, with no trouble at all, to La Hache and his Apache henchmen. Johnny poked his head into the store, awed by the magnificence of the sales.

The Apaches just stood around pointing at what they wanted, and a perspiring but happy J. D. loaded the goods onto the counter. Some of the Apaches were padding their way out, their arms full of merchandise, grinning and not yet sober.

Jules La Hache had the look of a laughing clown, round faced and red, with long black hair, pointed beard and thick, quizzical eyebrows. He leaned his large bulk against the counter, nodding benevolently each time J. D. jotted down a fresh item on the bill.

Johnny withdrew into the kitchen. "I never did see such tradin'," he marveled.

"Nor you never will agin, mebby," grunted Old Rock softly, and Johnny saw he was fitting new percussion caps to his pistol.

A half silence replaced the noise in the store, a hush in which two men talked, one in agitation, the other in a bland and amused drawl.

"But—really, Mr. La Hache, I understood you to say. . ."

"Did I say that? Well, well."

"Mr. La Hache, are you paying for all these goods, or are you not? I demand an honest answer!"

"No!"

"Then make your Indians give me back the goods!"

"Friend, *you* make 'em."

"Why, you—you—!"

"Ah, you would, would you?" The blandness fell from La Hache's voice, leaving it crackling sharp. Something metallic clattered on the floor, and an instant later J. D. gave out a hoarse sound of fear.

JOHNNY whirled, remembering Old Rock's pistol, and snatched at it. Old Rock jerked it back out of his reach. "No, y'don't! I need this m'self." Old Rock's tone carried no special ring of urgency, but it was thin and tinny. "They won't leave nobody livin', white or red, now the lid's off! I don't aim to die without a kick or two." He hobbled for the back door, pistol in hand.

Johnny looked toward the open door of the store again, and through it he

could see some of the Apaches, watching with a kind of brilliant eagerness something that was transpiring beyond Johnny's line of vision, where J. D. still uttered his hoarse cries. He saw something else, too—the old Hawkins rifle, propped against the wall where Old Rock had left it.

He muttered a query to Old Rock. Curiously, he used the same words that Big John Free had once used, and they came naturally to him. "Rocky, is that gun o' yours loaded?"

Old Rock sent him an odd, startled look, and he, too, spoke in the way that came most naturally to him. "Loaded an' set to pop," he said.

Their eyes met, and both nodded. "Well, then," said Johnny, "let's give 'em hell an' Hawkins!"

He walked into the store, while Old Rock eased out through the back door.

He didn't look toward the counter until he laid a hand on the Hawkins gun. One of the warriors took a lithe step his way, noted the look on his face, and paused, the look doing something to his first impulse. Johnny picked up the rifle, cocked the hammer as he set the wire-bound butt to his shoulder, and took sight at La Hache.

La Hache was behind the counter, moving slowly along it, waving a long and ugly skinning knife with a slicing motion before the white face of J. D., who backed away, shaking his head in dumb terror. Johnny had time to pity J. D., though it was pity with contempt, and he could understand exactly why the mountain men had looked at him the way they did. It was natural to pity lesser men who lacked your own confidence and mastery, once you had found that mastery.

The old Hawkins was smooth with long wear and the polish of much handling. It felt hard and compact to the touch, and familiar as an old friend's hand often gripped. Johnny curled his finger easily around the trigger, with not too much tension or too little—just enough to feel the firm pressure of the triplock, and he had the sense of having done all this before.

"La Hache," he said, "drop that knife, you scum, an' get out o' here!"

La Hache turned swiftly, not so much in alarm as in the manner of a violent man meeting a challenge. His long-haired head rose high in turning, and he stared with arrogant anger at Johnny. Then he, too, caught the look on Johnny's face, and he paid Johnny the compliment of showing that he felt he was challenged by one with a man's full right. He grew still and alert, holding the long knife level with his chin, his arm bent at the elbow.

The long knife twitched briefly, and Johnny read in La Hache's eyes no coming surrender, but a quick act of knife-throwing jugglery. "Drop it you—" he began, but the shifting flash of the knife in the lamplight cancelled the rest of it, and his curled finger followed through with its firm pressure.

The old Hawkins boomed a heavy roar and considerable smoke. Outside, a pistol exploded twice, and soon Old Rock called out: "I'm a-herdin' 'em back in with the goods, John. Was that La Hache you shot?"

JOHNNY walked into the camp, leading the pony. Firelight guided him to the camp, but it vanished as he approached, and somebody fell into step behind him in the dark. Then he halted, and somebody else kicked clods from the fire, which flamed up, and there sat the mountain men around it.

He said, "J. D. put Old Rock in charge of the post." And then he leaned lightly on the Hawkins rifle, waiting.

They briefly scanned his outfit, particularly the old gun, and that seemed to tell them all that they cared to know. Old Rock wouldn't have parted with the old Hawkins gun to anybody not qualified to have it.

Finally Mackinaw Cardiff looked up with an air of mild query. "Ain't you goin' to sit down, John?" he asked.

"Got room at your fire for me?" Johnny countered.

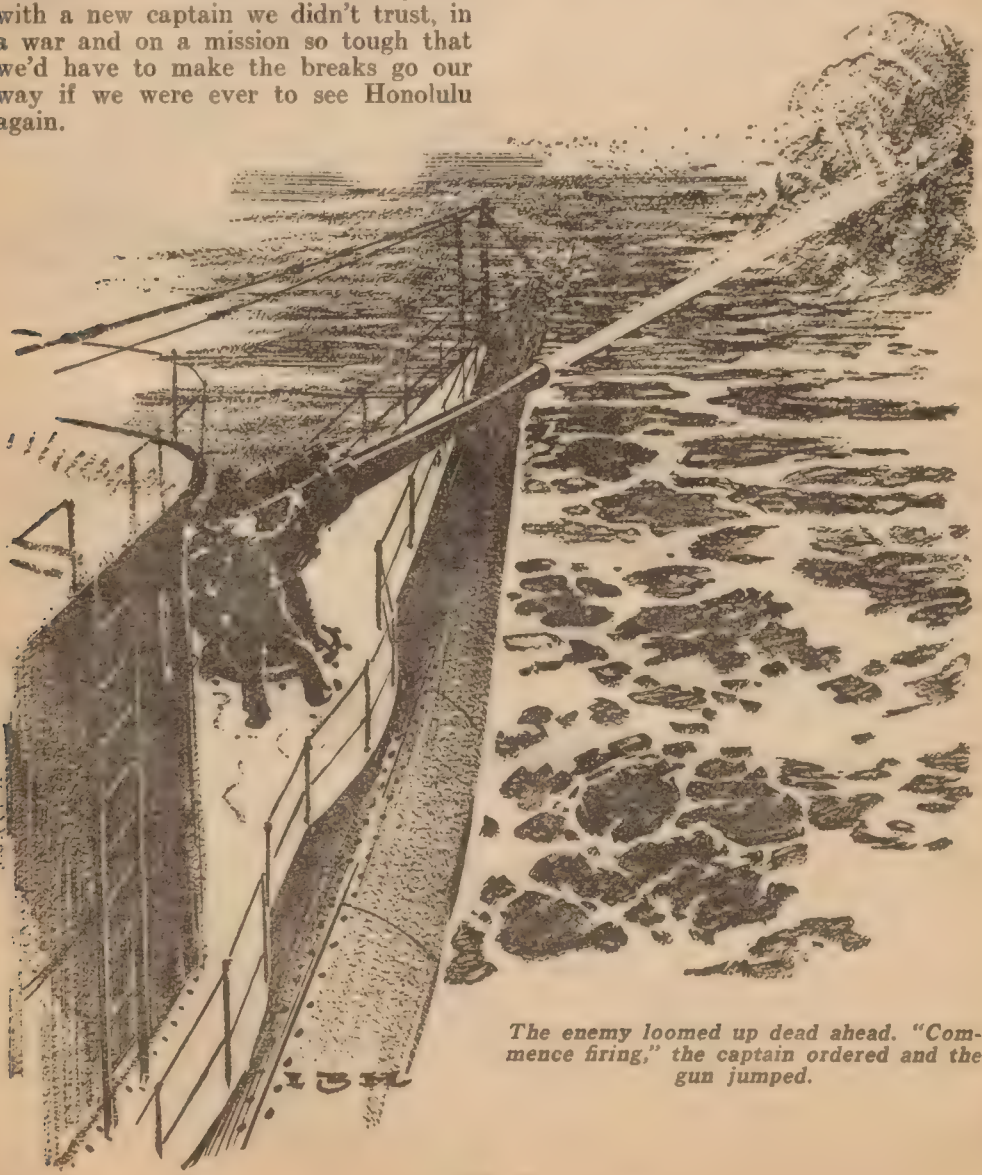
For the first time, Mackinaw Cardiff gave what could have passed as the shadow of a human grin. "I reckon so," he murmured. "Sure. I reckon there's room for the son of Big John Free."

A GOD WITH CLAY FEET

By CHARLES T. S. GLADDEN

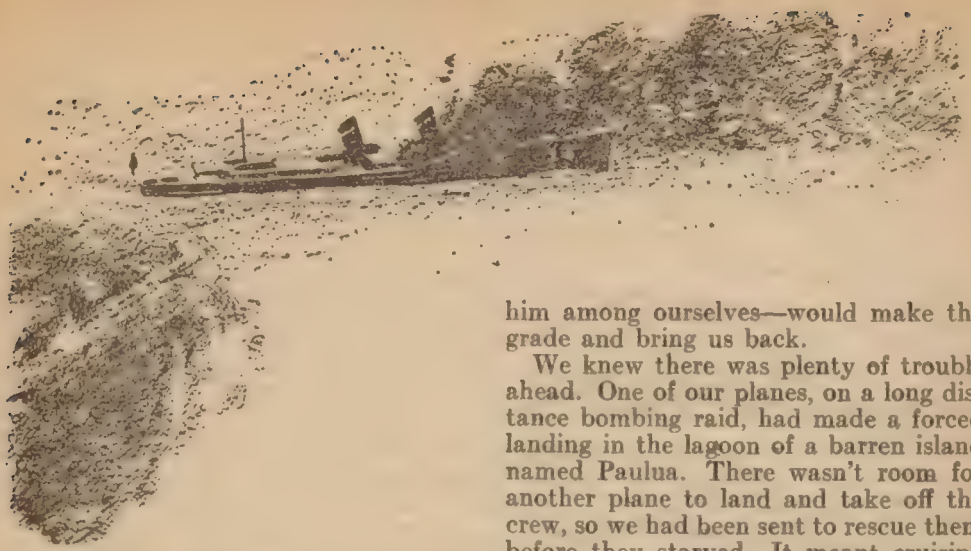
MAYBE the brass hats in Washington knew what they were doing when they ordered Commander Lane to relieve our captain. It would never have happened if they'd asked any one of the *Neptune's* crew, but the Navy isn't run that way. So here we were, a crew full of the jitters with a new captain we didn't trust, in a war and on a mission so tough that we'd have to make the breaks go our way if we were ever to see Honolulu again.

I didn't blame myself or any other man in the crew for feeling the way we did—a submarine skipper has to be just an inch short of God to his men. The stripes on his arm don't mean much unless they stand for leadership, brains, cold nerve and guts, and there wasn't



The enemy loomed up dead ahead. "Commence firing," the captain ordered and the gun jumped.

ILLUSTRATED BY I. B. HAZELTON



one man from Baby Johnson, our newest seaman, to myself, the leading chief, who didn't doubt our skipper's nerve.

We didn't blame him for having lost it. He'd been one of the six survivors from the *Driad*, rescued after six days of slow death in a submarine that was still on the bottom of the sea. Such an experience is bound to affect you, and he showed it in many ways that all of us saw too easily. He wouldn't trust the indicator lights to show when the main indication valve was closed—we had to put a lever on the shaft to show the actual position of the valve; an officer had to make an inspection of the boat for leaks every fifteen minutes when we were submerged. Worst of all, he wouldn't stay in the conning tower when we were diving and let the diving officer take control. Instead he'd come down to the control-room and stand there and take charge himself when we didn't think it necessary. God knows a submarine sailor wants a cautious skipper, but an over-cautious one is just as bad as a reckless one—both of them put that chicken bone of fear cross-wise your gizzard when the conning tower hatch goes under the water.

We had confidence in ourselves and our boat. We had E's on our gun, over our torpedo tubes and our engine-rooms, to prove that we were the best submarine in the Navy. But we didn't feel that Mother Lane—that's what we called him among ourselves—would make the grade and bring us back.

We knew there was plenty of trouble ahead. One of our planes, on a long distance bombing raid, had made a forced landing in the lagoon of a barren island named Paulua. There wasn't room for another plane to land and take off the crew, so we had been sent to rescue them before they starved. It meant cruising for four thousand miles in an area completely controlled by the enemy in the air and on the surface.

Under our old skipper I'd have welcomed such a job. I knew he could take us to hell and bring us back, but I felt that Commander Lane would blow up when the first depth bomb tossed us around. If he'd been like Captain Fisher, I'd have told him that he could trust every man to do his job, that we were the Navy's best, but Mother Lane didn't invite such confidence. His cold blue eyes stopped the words in your throat. Since he'd been on the boat, I'd never seen him speak to an officer or man, except in line of duty. He seemed all penned up in a shell, and I was afraid it wouldn't stand the first strain.

For three days we'd been cruising through blue seas so quiet and peaceful that it was hard to believe that tomorrow any ship or plane sighting us would give us a shower of depth bombs. Only one of us, Red Merchant, knew what that was like; he'd been in the pig boats in World War I, and the stories he told would curl your hair.

The fourth day we sighted smoke and went down. It was our first taste of war. Sparks, on the listening gear, reported the sounds of many propellers. We went to a hundred and fifty feet and shifted to the half switch and slow speed so they wouldn't pick up the sound of our props. It was a large enemy force. Sparks kept

giving their bearings—they were headed right for us—and everybody in the control-room watched the skipper.

IF LOOKS and actions meant anything, Mother Lane's nerves were all tied up in knots. His eyes ran from gauge to gauge. Each time the diving rudder motors turned over they darted back to the depth indicators. His hands grasped the rungs on the conning tower ladder so hard that his knuckles were white. He was dead quiet, and soon everybody else piped down. The only sounds in the compartment were the hum of the ventilator fan and the rattle of the rudder shafts.

Red came for'd from his engine-room and joined me. "How're things going?" he whispered.

"Ready to blow up any minute," I said. "See how white he is?"

"You ought to see your own mug," Red replied.

It was the first time I'd ever waited for depth bombs to start showering, and it was a hell of a long wait. Pretty soon we didn't need Sparks to tell us about the prop sounds. We could hear them—one especially. It had a high pitched note, a destroyer with a deck load of ash cans. Soon it was right overhead and sounded like an elevator train, then it faded away and I took a new lease on life.

After an hour of slow running we surfaced and started on our way again, with me in more of a stew than ever. I had been scared, and I knew that the skipper was too. Sure, I joked and kidded the boys about the incident. That was a part of my job as leading chief, but I was lying like hell.

The next three days we spent a lot of time under water. The ocean was full of ships, and they all belonged to the enemy, but nobody passed near us, thank God. On the seventh day we ran into rain squalls and couldn't see beyond a mile. They were so thick that we didn't have to worry about planes, but any moment we might find ourselves alongside a cruiser or destroyer. Either one would blow us out of the water before we could dive, so we stood at action stations all the time with our fingers crossed, and hoped for the best. The captain allowed only one man on the bridge with him as look-out. That night it was my turn. I was thankful for the dark. It was so black that we couldn't see each other across the six foot bridge, much less a ship, so I let my mind wonder about tomorrow.

The captain must have read my thoughts. "Maloney," he said, "if our luck holds out another ten hours, we'll have those men on board."

"Yes, sir," I replied, "and I bet they'll be the happiest sailors in the world."

"I know just how they feel," he went on. "Once I looked death in the face for six days—they've had weeks to think about it."

"Everybody knows about your experience. It must have been hell," I said.

"So much so that I've often wished I'd gone with the others." His voice kind of choked up.

I wanted to go over and pat him on the back and tell him I understood, but even the dark couldn't hide the difference between a C.P.O. and a three striper, so I just said, "Yes, sir," like a sailor does when he means everything or nothing.

I WAS asleep the next morning when the stopping of the engines awakened me. I bounced out of my bunk and waited for the crash dive howler. Instead, over the loud speaker came the words, "Chief Torpedoman Maloney report on the bridge."

I answered on the double and saw that we were creeping through rain that blanketed us like a curtain. I saluted and the captain said, "Maloney, our navigation shows that we've reached Paulua, but we can't see it. I am going in on soundings. You get the boat ready to go to the beach when I anchor."

"Aye, aye, sir," I said, and got my gang together. We took up the deck gratings that covered the boat-well, and were trying out the engine when we ran out of the rain and I saw Paulua, a flat sandy strip a few feet above the water, several miles away.

I was patting myself on the back because half of our troubles were over, when all hell broke loose! I heard a roar like an express train, and a spout of water shot up several hundred yards off the port beam. I looked to starboard and saw a destroyer break into the clearing and bear down on us. Another shell landed so close that the slick fell on deck. I heard the crash dive alarm, and my crew made a world's record in securing the boat and getting below. When the conning tower closed I caught my first breath. A second later I thought it was the last. There was a crash that nearly split my eardrums, and the boat quivered under the blow. We'd been hit, and it wasn't going to be long before we knew where.

"Level off at a hundred feet," the captain ordered. I hoped that we'd get there.

When the depth gauges read fifteen feet and nobody'd reported a leak, I knew we'd been hit in the superstructure, and took another few minutes lease on life. I wasn't betting any longer than that because I knew we'd been spotted and a depth bomb shower was on its way. The palms of my hands began to sweat, and I saw the bow plane man rubbing his on his pants to dry them off. We'd just leveled off at a hundred feet when I heard the destroyer's propellers.

"Full left rudder," the captain ordered. I saw he was using his bean and felt a little better, but not for long, because the roar overhead was growing fast. Soon it was right on top of us. I braced myself for the blow. It deafened me, and shook us like a cork. The floor plates jumped up and fell back with a rattle like the boat was falling apart. Some of our lights flashed and went out. In a second it was over. Then the next bomb went off. It knocked me flat on the deck. All the lights went out. I heard the rush of water down the conning tower, then the safety hatch banged and I knew it was the end.

"Turn on the emergency lights," the captain shouted. Nothing happened. Then a few lights came on and Red yelled from the after battery-room, "That ash can tripped the main circuit breaker and cut off the juice." I picked myself up and looked around. I saw the depth gauges still read one hundred feet. Then I saw the captain. He was white as a sheet and shaking like he had a chill.

"Maloney," he ordered, "go for'd and get a report of the damages."

I STARTED forward to see what damage had been done, but I didn't make it. Another bomb let go and I found myself on the deck again. This time I wasn't scared. They say a sailor can get used to anything, and this certainly proved it. I got up and headed once more for the torpedo-room. All lights were out and I had to use my flashlight. Every rivet head and seam squirted water down my neck. I climbed and fell over gear on the deck until I reached my prize torpedo compartment, and found it looking like the Silver Spray Bar after the sailors had cleaned it out.

I went back to the control-room and reported the damage, thankful that it wasn't worse and feeling pretty good until I heard Red give his tale of woe, "The water in the motor-room bilges is rising fast. We'll have to start our pumps to keep the main motors from shorting out."

That was terrible news. If we ran our pumps, the destroyer would see our oil slick, and we'd get hell again, probably for good, or we'd have to come up and surrender. Now it was up to the captain to make the decision for all of us. Either we drowned like rats or quit. I didn't see any other way out, but he did.

"Make all tubes ready for firing," he ordered. "Start the pumps."

I couldn't believe my ears. I thought he must be crazy. What chance had we, leaking like a sieve and pouring out an oil slick as plain as the tail on a kite, to sink a destroyer!

"Yes, sir," Red answered. He, too, was so surprised that he forgot the "Aye, aye."

"Level off at two hundred feet, full speed ahead on all motors," the captain ordered.

Down we went, and the fox hunt was on. I don't mind admitting that I was

scared. Maybe it was the darkness that hid my shipmates until somebody stabbed them with a flashlight. It made me feel like I did one night when I was a kid and went swimming in the ocean all by myself.

Soon we knew that the enemy was on our trail again. This time he let go a string of four bombs, but none of them were as bad as any of the first round. Our deep running was doing the trick.

The skipper put us on the half switch while we listened and learned that the enemy was listening too. So we kept still and waited for him to start up first. It was a game of each one trying to outwait and out-think the other. Soon Sparks gave us a bearing, then a different one. That meant the destroyer had started again.

"The periscopes are shot away, we'll make a sound attack," the captain announced.

Sparks started giving him the bearings.

"Seventy-five degrees on the port bow," he reported.

"We're headed fifty, that makes him three-forty true," the skipper announced.

"She's bearing seventy on the bow," Sparks said.

"That means she's on a course somewhere between zero and one-eighty degrees," the captain decided aloud. "Shift to series—course one-ten—speed eight—start the approach," he ordered.

Sparks gave the bearings and Lieutenant Henderson, our torpedo officer, plotted them down. "Enemy course one-sixty, speed twenty, our firing bearing twenty degrees left," he announced.

"Let me know when he bears twenty-one degrees," the captain ordered.

It seemed a year before Sparks said, "Twenty-one, sir."

"Fire one," the captain ordered.

I felt the kick of the compressed air as the first of my fish left the tube.

"Fire two—fire three—fire four," the captain ordered.

WE CHANGED to full speed and started to turn with full rudder to get out of the way, and listened for the explosion that tells of a hit. None came and my heart sank into my boots. All were misses, and our position was plain as the nose on your face. The destroyer had only to run down our torpedo tracks to find where we had been.

He wasn't long in doing that and starting a depth bomb barrage. The first one sounded faintly, then each one got louder. Closer and closer they came, while I waited for the one with our number on it. It seemed to go off under my feet the way it lifted me up. I didn't see how the *Neptune* could stand it. I looked at the depth gauge glowing in a flashlight and saw that we were coming up like a cork.

"Full dive rudder!" the captain shouted.

They caught the ship at sixty feet and we leveled off again, while the bombs came so fast that I lost count. At last they stopped and I pinched myself to see if I was really alive. My joy didn't last long. I caught a smell that made my hair stand up straight—chlorine gas. Our battery tanks were leaking salt water into the storage batteries; in a short while every man would be dead as a mackerel. Already I was starting to cough as the poison cut my lungs.

"Stop all ventilators," the captain ordered. He searched around with his flashlight until he picked me up, then held it on me. I felt something coming and the sweat popped out on my forehead. "There's still a way out," he announced, "if we're lucky. What's that destroyer doing now?" he asked.

"It's coming back again," Sparks replied.

"Maloney, muster your gun crew, on the double," the captain ordered.

I passed the word and we gathered around him in the dark control-room. "All present, sir," I reported. My tongue was so dry I could hardly speak.

"Now listen carefully," he said. "We're between the devil and the bottom at a thousand fathoms, but we still have a chance. We're going to surface and fight him with our gun."

I couldn't believe my ears. Was this the man I'd been afraid would crack, who I thought lacked guts! I couldn't understand what had come about. I didn't want to. All I knew was that I'd

found a man I'd follow to hell. My crew must have felt the same way. They broke out in a cheer that I'd never heard before.

"What's the enemy doing now?" the captain asked.

"Heading back this way for another round," Sparks replied.

"For one of mine," my loader announced.

"Change course for the enemy and level off at forty feet," the skipper ordered.

It seemed a year before we leveled off. During that time I understood how a soldier must feel when waiting to go over the top. My head itched and chills ran up and down my spine. At last came the order: "Surface man the gun."

I WAS the first one out of the conning tower hatch, and my crew followed me like well greased cogs in a machine. When I slammed the breech block on the first shell, I spat on it for good luck and said all the prayer a sailor knows—"God help us." I meant it. Not until then did I notice that we were in a rain squall.

"Train dead ahead, range two thousand, drift ninety," the captain ordered.

A mile was as far as you could see. My crew stood like boxers in the ring waiting for the bell to sound. No one spoke. The only sound was the slap of the water against our sides. Instantly, like a movie thrown on the screen, the enemy loomed up dead ahead.

"Commence firing," the captain ordered.

I watched the gun move slightly to the right, then left, then back. Then it jumped. Before the blast was clear I had another shell loaded and ready. I looked up in time to see a black cloud of smoke blot out the destroyer's bridge. Pieces of tin sailed through the air. She started to turn, still at high speed. My gun kicked again. I saw a red hole glowing in her side just at the base of her number one stack, then a cloud of steam covered her almost entirely.

"Rapid fire," the captain shouted. My gun kicked like a bucking bronco as we pumped out the shells. Every one was a hit at point blank range. The destroyer spouted steam like a geyser and slowed to a walk. I saw the wakes of two of my torpedoes headed for her sides. Both of them hit, one for'd, the other aft. When the two water spouts subsided, she had disappeared.

We cruised around the wreckage and picked up a few survivors, then the captain called me on the bridge.

"That was fine work from your gun's crew," he said. "Now try and do as well with the boat. Be careful in making the beach. Don't let anything keep you from rescuing these men." His eyes bored through me, and a fire glowed in them, the first I'd ever seen. "I've lived in a nightmare for eight days," he went on, "afraid something might happen to prevent their rescue. I've feared fate, my crew, myself."

So that was the answer, that was why he hadn't trusted us. The *Driad* hadn't broken his nerve at all. It had bred one that had nearly broken me. I should have known better than to try to think. A sailor's likely to get off course when he does, especially a pigboat sailor.

LIVE BY THE SWORD

A Tale of the Borgias

By F. R. BUCKLEY

SYNOPSIS

JUNE, 1497—and I, GASPARE TORELLA, late of Spain, stalked the streets of Rome, possessed only of a sword, the clothes I stood up in, and my degree as a physician—valuable in that order. A sudden cry in the night brought me to the aid of a man fallen at the hands of two bravos, and they being in the Cardinal's service and knowing he was in need of a doctor, seized me and brought me to him.

Thus I found myself in the midst of the Borgia Pope's family: his three sons —JUAN, drunk and dissolute; GIUFFREDO, weak and effeminate; and CESARE, the CARDINAL, cold, heartless and brilliant; and their mother, VANOZZA DE' CATANEI. But with honors of the Church and empire upon them, these Borgias were quarreling like fish-hawkers—only Cesare the Cardinal acting worthy of his rank. He, having approved me with his cold blue eyes, pronounced me his personal physician.

Suddenly, the mortal hatred between him and his elder brother flared into violence, Juan plunging a table knife into Cesare's breast—he being saved only by the corselet he wore. Deadly and implacable, Cesare forced Juan to ride with him to Rome, myself and his two bravos in attendance, and in a moonlit square forced him to defend himself with his sword. Chilled with horror, I watched the brothers duel to the death —till Cesare ran Juan through the heart, then coldly ordered him thrown into the Tiber.

At the Vatican, this man whom I looked on as a murderer, took me into his confidence; in his brother's place he planned to unify a divided Italy, cure her of her petty tyrants, and make her strong against France. His ambition was boundless: Caesar or nothing!

Lest I be tortured to force a confession in Juan's killing, Cesare sent me into hiding in the country where I wrote my book on the healing benefits of mercury. This Cesare later read and used the knowledge in a way I never dreamed of. . . .

Having blackmailed LOUIS XII of France to aid him against Milan, he sailed amidst pagan splendor to impress the French. There he married CHARLOTTE OF NAVARRE, a child of seventeen, against her will, and lived with her only long enough to get her with child and arm an expedition against Milan. 'Twas then I learned how he had poisoned the BISHOP OF CEUTA for betraying a Papal secret, and realized with horror that I had, unwittingly,

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN CLYMER

through my knowledge of mercury, become his official poisoner!

I well knew that to desert Cesare was to die, but I was going to war as a soldier and might fall in battle. . . . In the siege of Milan, I fell wounded, and when I regained consciousness found myself in a farmhouse, tenderly nursed by AGATA NORI, motherless daughter of a poor but proud Milanese who hated Cesare and thought me in the service of the French. I fell in love with Agata, and just as I thought of leaving Cesare's service to practice medicine in the country, his messenger brought me orders to proceed to Imola. This pestilence-ridden city was held by the COUNTESS CATERINA SFORZA, a bold, imperious woman whom Cesare had had deposed by Papal decree but who was determined to fight him to the death. It fell to my lot to uncover her diabolic plan to poison the Pope by means of a dispatch bearing infection, and with this news I rode to the Vatican and gasped out my tale to Cesare.

Having risen by secret means and private assassinations, Cesare now had the courts do his killings legally so that the world might approve, and by this means was Caterina's courier tried and slain. In the siege of Imola, Cesare contrived to get CAPTAIN DI NALDI, commander of the citadel, in his power by means of a beautiful temptress. But when Naldi's wife and children were

And in that eye-blink, he turned with a back-handed cut that shore Francesco's head entirely from his body.

held hostages by Caterina, the unhappy man still had to make a show of defending the citadel. In the end, he chose to die as a soldier, taking the temptress with him. Cesare, offering to parley with Caterina, went halfway across the lowered drawbridge, only to find she had tricked him, and was forced to leap ignominiously to safety. It was not until he offered a huge ransom that a Burgundian soldier delivered the untameable Countess as prisoner. Meanwhile, through the good offices of ASTORRE, beloved young ruler of Faenza, who had befriended Cesare, I received Cesare's promise to send his courier, JACOPO, with a letter to Agata. My grief was great when later Cesare broke broke the news to me that my love was dead. . . .

Returning to Rome, Cesare presented himself before the populace in the role of conqueror, with Caterina, the prize of his triumphs, a prisoner in manacles of gold. Conspiring nightly with traitors of towns to be besieged, Cesare attracted to himself crackpots of every color, among them the insignificant Florentine, Machiavelli, who invented the term "lightning war." When Faenza fell by treachery, from within, Cesare had Astorre strangled, yet won public favor by hanging the traitor.

In the way of his rise to kingship stood the rich county of Sinigaglia, in the hands of the powerful *condottieri*, who conspired against him: VITELLOZZO VITELLI, OLIVEROTTO DA FERMO and GIANPAOLO BAGLIONI. It was in 1503 that Cesare, under the guise of friendship, trapped Vitellozzo and Oliverotto (Gianpaolo escaped through illness) in the Palazzo Orsini, and having tried them for treason, strangled them with his bare hands. "His Majesty," said Machiavelli in awe.

PART IV

WHOEVER should have seen Cesare Borgia at Assisi, ten days after those stranglings at Sinigaglia, would have thought him a king indeed—I see him now, in my mind's eye, as he headed his council in the great hall of the Ordelaffi palace.

Girolamo, the mad priest, Michele da Corella, the bravo turned soldier, and I, who was to cure the world of all its physical ills and amuse Cesare betweenwhiles—sat, so to speak, as ministers. The body of the assembly was made up of the governors, vicars, *podestas* the Duke had appointed to the various towns he had taken. He had called them in haste from their bailiwicks and throughout the night had received their reports, and given them instructions relating to this kingdom of which he had all but the crown.

From the square outside came the continual tramp-clank, clank-tramp of marching troops—we were to leave for Rome that day of which the dawn was now breaking.

And fitfully, through that undertone of sound, came the treble rapping, rapping of hammers as workmen built a gallows. Cesare had a little business to transact before he went home for his second triumph. He had saved Paolo Orsini and his brother, the Duke of Gravina, from that trap of Sinigaglia for better exhibition elsewhere; and now he was going to hang them.

As the first ray of sunlight struck through the windows, the Duke blew out the candle that was guttering before him, and told the rabble of deputies that they might go.

"There'll be some little entertainment outside in the square, in a few minutes," he told them in a weary voice, nodding to where the scaffold loomed in the lightening mist, "but whether ye stay for it or not, masters—remember what it portends for you and your people. Obey me, and ye shall have better lives than you have lived before; oppose me, and by God—prince or peasant, you shall be crushed!"

Out they went, looking scared and leaving behind them on the floor a litter of bread-crusts and rinds of sausage.

Cesare was left with us, his Council of Three. In the seats of the mighty, we had had nothing to eat since supper the night before, and both Girolamo and Michele da Corella looked grim.

"Well?" says the Duke; and they were hungry enough to answer him forthright.

"My son," says Girolamo, who in addition had saddle-galls—his duty was to ride about the provinces, overseeing —"I tell thee, there is danger in all this. I have said so before, and I say it again: the people acknowledge thee for their lord, but they demand—"

"*Demand?*" says the Duke sharply.

"Aye, *demand*—that Your Grace recognize them as human beings, and not pawns to be moved about a chessboard, or animals to be driven hither and yon, and at the end to the slaughter. There have been riots at Fano. Why? Because the folks were forbidden to hold a procession. It had no meaning, says Your Lordship, but they had been doing it for a thousand years. There's been killing at Ceri. Why? Because the Dyers Guild—"

"Damn the dyers! There are too many dyers! Is it not common sense—"

"Man shall not live by bread alone," says the monk—actually daring to interrupt His Highness, even if it was with Holy Writ. "And still less by common sense. Indeed, so far as I've seen, 'tis just for their foolishness that men will fight most fiercely."

Oons, that was what Cesare's mother had said, months ago! I saw he remembered it, too.

"AND as regards this matter of fighting," Girolamo went on, rolling a red eye at Michele da Corella, "this new edict, that every house in the Romagna shall stand ready to furnish one man to go to the market-place when the bells are rung—"

"That's *my* plan!" cries Michele.

"So I thought. And 'tis thou likewise —doubtless—that's ordained they shall be dressed like monkeys in parti-colored suits with His Lordship's name on the backs and bellies—"

"'Sdeath!" shouts Michele, reaching to his belt; and had not Cesare stepped between them, I think he would have done the friar a mischief. "'Tis soldiers have built this kingdom, shave-poll, and 'tis soldiers—"

"Leave roaring," says the Duke. "And if thou'st anything reasonable to say, say it."

Chilled, Michele shuffled with his feet and looked uncomfortable.

"Soldiers!" shouts Girolamo. "Why, half these free-lances are rotten with mutiny. They—"

"If they are," shouts Michele, raging again, "'tis not for soldier reasons, but on account of *thy* kind of work. So now!"

He bit his thumb at him.

"What kind of work is that" asked Cesare; and the bravo was silent.

"Well? Speak!"

"Under favor, Your Highness, under favor—there hath been some muttering—"

"And this is the first I hear of it? Well? Concerning what?"

"The men, sir—I stabbed one of 'em —but they say—being ignorant—and all they've had over them until now have been common *condottiere*—they don't understand a great general like Your Grace—"

"They say you'll strangle and poison and send men into battle fast enough," says Girolamo harshly, "but that Your Grace won't fight, himself."

Cesare went pale as death.

"Is this true, Michele?"

The captain shrugged and made a motion to point at the gallows in the square.

"So," says the Duke; and considered. "Well—we'll see. Captain!"

"Your Highness!"

"Go down and halt the troops—any troops—that are passing through the square. Bound to be free-lances among 'em. Have them clear the market-place of citizens and line it themselves. Six deep."

Michele saluted, looking puzzled.

"Or deeper, so long as they can have a good view of the scaffold."

"Yes, Sire."

"Give that order, and then," says Cesare, walking leisurely over to a *credenza* and picking up his sword, "go thyself and release the two Orsini brethren."

"The prisoners, Your Highness?"

"Release them—in custody. And give them swords, and let them supple up their wrists."

"But, Your Highness—"

"Silence!"

It seemed time for me to speak.

"Would Your Grace condescend to give us—in our anxiety—some idea—"

Cesare smiled at me first, and then at the other two, clasping his silk-clad elbows with his hands.

"Lest my men misunderstand me," he said, "I propose—instead of hanging those traitors on that scaffold—to fight them on it. And if there be one of their soldiers who would dare to do the same, let him say so when I've killed them, and I'll fight *him*."

"Your Grace!" cries Michele in horror, "these are two of the best swordsmen in Italy!"

Cesare nodded.

"The reverend father here," says he, "hath said I do wrong. Ah yes, Girolamo—I know my rule is not that of Saint Augustine. I've lain awake too many nights—well, now we'll see. Francesco and Paolo Orsini together ought to kill me. If they do—I shall rule no more. If not—ordeal by battle! . . . Captain da Corella, I gave you an order!"

THERE was no disputing with that tone in his voice. Michele saluted again and was gone.

It made me shudder—as, half an hour later, I watched with Girolamo from the palace window—to see Cesare mount the steps to that grim wooden platform. He was in shirt and hose, as men are usually when they go up such stairs to their death; and if he had a sword in his hand—why, there were two swords in the hands of those Orsini awaiting him under the looped-up ropes that were to have strangled them.

The platform may have been eight or ten paces square, with the gallows-posts rising clear of it at either side. It was high enough to afford good view to every soldier in the piazza. They were ranged many more than six deep—there must have been two or three thousand of them—and as the Duke came to scaffold-level, they breathed from amid their beards a long sigh. Cesare paid them no heed, tried the texture of the planking with his feet, chucked his hilt a couple of times to settle it well in his hand, looked from one to other of the Orsini as they crouched ready in their corners—and put himself on guard.

I think the others must have had opportunity—while they were supposed to be suppling their wrists, and Cesare was confessing himself to Fra Girolamo—to concert a plan of action. Or perhaps Despair, that hath a spur on each heel, kicked both of them at the same moment.

At all events—without the hesitation of an instant, they now flew at Cesare, from their different directions, with the speed and fury of wildcats.

Well for him that he had advanced some distance across the scaffold toward them! For now, with the litheness of mind and body that ever marked him, he could leap back his own length and let them, who were converging on the spot where he had stood, come together and jostle each other, as it were. In the instant their shoulders were together, the brothers were off balance, and in that instant, Cesare Borgia leaped in, pinked the Duke of Gravina in the sword-arm, and leaped away again.

It was not a very deep thrust, not enough to make that Orsini drop his sword, but I knew—I knew!—that it must be the end of him unless he and his brother could contrive to kill Cesare within the next few minutes. The wound was in the biceps muscle of the upper arm, which when hurt contracteth and so stiffens. And the fool—thank God!—instead of exercising the arm by foining with his blade or what not, was keeping it as still as possible, while for the moment his brother pressed the attack.

Paolo Orsini was, I think, the better swordsman of the two, but not swordsman enough to break through the flashing fence of steel my master threw up in front of himself. Having been brought up to sword-and-dagger work myself, I have marveled all my life at the Italian school of fighting; but never, before or since, have I seen it exemplified as it was by Cesare Borgia that day. He had spoken of ordeal by battle, with Heaven favoring the right; certainly it seemed to me, as he stood there parrying every

thrust Paolo sent at him, and finding time to foil the occasional lunges of Francesco as well, that he was protected by something more than his sword.

But not necessarily Heaven. . . .

It could not last forever—his wrist must tire—but I saw that Paolo, as attacker, was tiring the more quickly. And then I saw that Orsini had a plan in mind: to force Cesare around until the wounded Francesco could take him in the rear. The soldiers lining the square saw it too—they were quite out of order by this time, standing on their tip-toes and craning their necks—and they sent up a hoarse roar of warning.

Cesare was smiling to himself as he skipped out of the way to one side and left his adversaries facing each other with nothing between them but thin air.

HE SENT, in that moment, a shrewd thrust at Paolo Orsini's neck, but it fell short, and before he could recover himself Francesco had made a mighty effort and driven his blade through and through—the fullness of Cesare's shirt.

I gasped so that I drew spittle into my lungs, and for the next few pasados was blind with coughing. But when I had wiped the tears from my eyes, there was my master still, beginning to crouch lower as his legs tired, but still facing the Orsini brethren with the point of his sword flickering back and forth like a viper's tongue. All three of the adversaries were playing for breath; the crowded square was deadly silent.

"Come, come, gentlemen!" Cesare's voice said clearly. "This is slower than hanging! And I'm in haste to be at Rome."

I laughed, myself—on a queer high note that astonished me. As for the massed *condottieri*, they roared. At which Paolo Orsini, so lately in command of so many of them, turned pale with fury and launched an attack for which he had not the wind. As Cesare had doubtless known he would—he knew everything. . . .

Francesco moved his sword from his right hand to his left—and with a thrust that darted out of his defense like a lightning-flash from a cloud, Cesare almost caught him in the throat. Francesco fell back a pace—heavily, on his heels—and winced as he put the hilt back in his right hand and tried to bend the arm.

"Drive him back against me, Paolo!" he shouted hoarsely, lumbering about the old trick of trying to get behind my Duke. "Spit the bastard!"

Fatal word!

At the very instant of its utterance, Cesare flung himself deliberately midway between the brothers and, from the angle made possible by this mad maneuver, ran Paolo Orsini through the neck just under the ear. Death, death! There was no hope for him—and there would have been none for Cesare, his back full exposed to Francesco, but for that early wound that had stiffened Francesco's arm. The Duke of Gravina lunged, to be sure, fair at the midst of Cesare's spine, but—his arm was just an eye-blink too late in shooting forth.

And in that eye-blink, the Duke of Valentinois and the Romagna turned with a back-handed cut that shore Francesco's head entirely from his body.

It bounced across the planking, and as Paolo Orsini staggered blindly forward, hands to neck, he kicked it; stumbled on it and fell full length on his face, stone dead.

What a roar went up from the ruffians in the square!

They bellowed and they laughed, and one of them shouted some joke about Florentine football; and Cesare stood still, sword in hand, looking at them until the pandemonium settled into cries of, *"Viva il Duce! Il Re! Evviva il Duce—il Re Cesare!"*

Then he held up his hand. The crowd, half-mad, like hunting leopards that have been blooded, shouted, "Cesare! Cesare!" for what seemed like an eternity more; but at last they were silent.

"I had intended to provide," says the Duke in a clear, loud voice, "that if these—traitors—killed me, they were to go free, to lead you men again. In my haste to meet them, I forgot to do it, and I am sorry I thus risked your livelihoods."

They stared at him, dumb-struck.

"However," says Cesare, jerking his head backward at his fallen foes, "the question—after all—does not arise."

He raised his sword in salute to them, and walked, laughing, to the scaffold steps, amid thunders of applause and mirth.

But when he came into the palazzo and took his doublet from the hands of poor old trembling Pietro, he was grim as death.

"Enough of this foolery—forever!" says he sternly. "Captain da Corella—we ride within the hour."

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW POISON

IT WAS—it may be still, for aught I know—a legend throughout Italy, that fight. By the time we had been in Rome three months, I was hearing how Cesare had fought all five of the mutineers and cut off all their heads; and a lady (who sought my assistance in the poisoning of her husband) said the decapitations had been all at one stroke.

And I make no doubt that if His Highness is still remembered in Italy—he's quite forgotten here in Navarre, and to this quiet town of Viana there come few visitors from abroad—I make no doubt, I say, but that by this time he is credited with fighting the whole free-lance army and beheading it.

Perhaps, though, that would be too much even for legend. There were fifteen thousand free-lances, which force, added to those that had been ours before, gave the Duke an immediate effectiveness of thirty thousand men, with forty or fifty cannon. With the levies—those householders of Michele da Corella's—he had in prospect an army of sixty thousand, and wherever there was an armorer's shop it was ringing with work on breastplates, while every foundry was flaming with the casting of cannon.

Cesare had men and lands. Now—as he told the Pope in my presence—what he needed, to arm the men and conquer more lands, was money.

"But Cesare," says the old man, shaking his head, "you've had money. Money beyond dreams."

"I must have more. Armor must be paid for. So must powder and shot—and traitors."

Alexander VI licked his lips.

"You have won back the lands of the Church," he said. "Look you, Cesare, as soon as Florence comes to an agreement, I'll crown thee King of Tuscany—"

"Tuscany!" says Cesare in scorn. "How am I to rule in Tuscany, with the French and Milanese living anyhow to the north of me, and the French and Spaniards fighting who shall lord it in the south? I cannot stop where I am—I must go on. Until all Italy is one kingdom."

"And the lion shall lie down with the lamb," says His Holiness. "Cesare, Cesare! This reconciliation of the beasts is not within the power of mere man, nor promised us for this age."

"It's within *my* power," says Cesare violently, "and I'll bring it to pass in this age if I have to kill—"

He checked himself.

"Father, I must go forward with this work. And to go forward, I must have money. *There is money to be had.*"

Alexander looked at the Duke like a bird fascinated by a snake.

"I must advance now, or see all I have done fall to pieces. I'll not have that! . . . The Cardinal Orsini died most handily in prison."

The Pope started violently in his chair.

"He was a traitor! He banded those condottieri against thee! Would you have had me deliver a Prince of the Church to the common hangman?"

"His wealth was most useful," says Cesare, unmoved, "but—pouf! What's a hundred thousand ducats to an army? *There are so many wealthy Cardinals in Rome.*"

Now I licked my lips. They were dry.

"*Too many,*" says the Duke.

THE Pope stretched forth trembling hands. I saw the Ring of the Fisherman gleaming on his finger.

"My son—my son!" he implored. "Think! In the name of God, I adjure

you—stop while there is yet time! A bullet or a sword-blade might find thee in thy—with this great work unfinished. It would fall to ruin and great would be the fall thereof. 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city—'"

"Your Holiness has all my plans—all the threads in hand. You could continue."

"But I am an old man."

"But a redoubtable strong one, and—look you, so long as either of us lives, this kingdom of mine can go on to completion. 'Tis not a matter of one life, but of two, thine and mine—and both most carefully guarded. For the ruin thou fearest, both of us must be laid by—and at the same time—and what are the chances of that?"

"God moves in a mysterious way," muttered Alexander. He seemed, of a sudden, to be aged far beyond his seventy-two years. "The presumption of the Israelites—The Tower of Babel—"

"There's no confusion of tongues in Italy," says Cesare, "and there shall be no confusion of rule, either. I—"

"Thou—*thou*," said Alexander weakly, "to be Pope after me!"

"And why not? There have been worse."

The old man's hand, with the great ring on it, slipped out of his lap and hung dangling. For the moment, I thought he had fainted, but Cesare was merciless. As I started forward, he reached out his hand and shook His Holiness roughly by the shoulder.

"And meantime," says he, through his teeth, "this question of money! There's your Cardinal Corneto, wallowing in wealth; there's that hog from Modena, that everybody hates; there's Cardinal Michieli—"

This was March.

Cardinal Michieli died in April.

By July, 'twas gossip that he had left an hundred and fifty thousand ducats.

In July, Cesare hired another five hundred light horse.

And I remember the first use he made of them.

Ever since the Duke had left, and especially as the Spring drew on, there had been increasing murmurs from the Romagna—the folk said that he had promised them relief from taxes, but that now they found themselves more heavily taxed than ever.

At planting time, they had learned they were to pay a soldo for every acre of wheat they put into the ground—and this for wars beyond their ken. The farmers of Fossombrone (I think it was) had refused to pay.

These new horsemen of Cesare's came north to them and burned every wheat-stalk of their crops.

South to the Duke, and raging, came immediately Girolamo di Trano, the mad priest, furious for his flock. So mad was he now—I mean, so much did he care for poor people and so little for his own life—that he flung aside sentries and burst into the room where Cesare was holding council.

"Woe! Woe! Iniquity! Iniquity!" shouts Girolamo, regardless of the astonished Spaniards (the Duke was negotiating with the Spanish against the French, that day; day before, it had been with the French against the Spaniards). "The City of God is burning, burning! The hireling shepherd is slaughtering the sheep!"

The Duke arose from his seat, gathering his robes about him. He was magnificently dressed, to impress the foreigners. I saw his eyes shuttle as he thought how he could turn even this good madman to his purpose.

"My Lord Bishop," says he, "I will answer you from Scripture also, wherein love is linked with chastening. And further it is said that 'tis just that one should suffer for many. Gaspare—"

"Blasphemy!" shouts Girolamo. "The words of the High Priest that killed Christ!"

"Gaspare," says Cesare, "take his reverence away and give him a composing draught."

I approached, but Girolamo pushed me off.

"Poison, likely," he gasped, "but thou'lt not—"

"Sentry!" snapped His Grace in a tone of steel—and soon Girolamo was weeping in an ante-room.

"I have been deceived!" he sobbed. "I have been seduced into the service of the devil!"

"Come, brother," says I, though my heart was very low, "His Highness is building a better Italy."

"What use shall that be, to dead men, dead babies and broken hearts? O Gaspare—could thou have seen them, standing at their cottage doors—their little patches of grain—the smoke rising, and those grinning devils with their torches—"

THE Cardinal of Modena fell desperate ill.

He was said to have amassed two hundred thousand ducats.

Cesare had arranged to hire a thousand more cavalry and had ordered, at one time, from a broker of Ferrara, no less than fifty new guns. . . .

Rumor had it that as soon as these last troops were paid for, the Duke would join the Spaniards in Naples, to fight against his first allies, the French. And Latin verses, hung by wits on the statue of Pasquino, asked why Modena did not die so that the earth could have his body, hell his soul, and the Borgias his money.

Cesare was blazing with impatience when at last—I have said naught of what had gone on in my mind these last few months, but it was at long last—I went one sultry evening to his cabinet. It was August, the fifth of the month and stifling hot. Thunder hung heavy over the city, but the lightning would not break.

His Highness greeted me friendly, glad (I knew him so well!) to have someone on whom to launch his complaints.

"His Majesty of France is saying I've betrayed him, and is raging in the north," says he, biting his nails. "I must go south and beat his forces there—quickly, quickly—what did that little Florentine call my style of war? Never mind. I must be quick—and that hog of a Modena will not die!"

Speaking of the Cardinal seemed to remind him of me—as a human being, I mean, rather than a receptacle for his ravings.

"Why, Gaspare," says he, "glum again? Not still thinking of that girl of thine, for God's sake?"

The blood seemed to have drained away from my limbs, and I had difficulty in speaking.

"Your Highness—"

Watching me narrowly, the Duke seated himself.

"Well?"

"Your Grace, I think, hath—engaged another physician."

He put his joined finger-tips to his mouth, his old gesture of caution.

"Another physician? What makes thee think that?"

"I was talking with the doctor of the Cardinal of Modena, yesterday."

"Well?"

It was now or never. His eyes terrified me, but I must run the gauntlet of them, or—

"From the tale of His Eminence's symptoms," says I, "it would seem that he hath been poisoned. Not with mercury. But with—something—to which I—have not introduced Your Grace."

The Duke's eyes were like blue diamonds.

"And in thine opinion," says he softly, "that would be—"

I would not let him glare me into damnation! Enough, enough!

"Arsenic," said I.

That was a horrible moment.

Entirely I expected he would kill me, and with the forefinger of one hand I was making the sign of the cross in the palm of the other. But he made no move; just sat there staring at me.

AT LAST he spoke.

"Gaspare," says he slowly, "y'are right. Mercury's a deal too slow for me nowadays—and thou'rt a deal too scrupulous. Thou'rt a good little man, in short, and I can no longer afford the luxury of virtue so close to me. So I've hired a man from Padua, and he hath done very well. Hast *thou* ever heard of the merits of powdered diamond? Simulates a low fever; kills in a month or so."

I stood silent, sweating.

"Thou'st done better as a soldier than as a physician," says the Duke. "It had been in my mind to make thee governor of some town or other—but—I have my doubts. I mean, as to thy fitness for

statecraft at all. Dost thou join me therein?"

I nodded.

"I thought so. Then thou'rt here to demand thy dismissal?"

"Under favor, Sire."

"I thought that too. Going to Nori, to grieve over the girl's grave?"

A great lump formed in my throat, and my eyes filled suddenly with ridiculous tears.

In a moment, Cesare was up from his seat and had his arm about my shoulders in the old way.

"Nay, nay, Gaspare," he said, "forgive me. I am a hard man, heavily beset, but I have a soft moment for thee. Thou'rt right; an earthen pot among iron kettles—that's my Gaspare."

"Under favor, Sire, if I could go back to my birthplace—"

"Where's that?"

"At Viana, Your Highness. In Navarre."

"Viana? Why, that's the town they're always fighting over, is it not? In the kingdom of my brother-in-law! Well—he loves me not, but he should favor one I recommend as hating me. Dost hate me, Gaspare?"

Oons, that lump in the throat! I feel it now; but then, I could not speak.

"Well, whether or not," says the Duke, looking into my face and smiling—and then suddenly the smile was wiped away. A sombre thought struck him and he dropped his arm from my shoulders. "Forget my mockery. Go see thy girl's—grave—first, Gaspare. I may—I may not have been always—a good lord to thee. Life is difficult. I—"

He was at his desk now, fumbling with some papers. After a moment, he looked up, as if nothing out of the ordinary had passed between us.

"I am going with His Holiness tonight, to dine with the Cardinal Corneto," says he. "Thou'lt come too, Gaspare. The music and what-not may improve thy mulligrubs. Tomorrow—I may have—something to say to thee."

I wondered—was Adriano di Corneto to be poisoned too? Was I to be chained again, somehow, to this hellish chariot?

I think Cesare must have read my thoughts. He had the faculty—how oft had I seen him use it to gain his ends!

"Thou'rt still in my service, till tomorrow!" he shouted suddenly. "Thou'st thine orders! Obey them! Begone!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE BANQUET

SUPPER with Cesare Borgia! Six years since I had supped with him that first time, at his mother's house in the Suburra. Now we were supping in the Suburra again—and in such style as to remind me of the long road we had traveled between-times. I had ridden to *that* feast penniless and hungry, on the crupper of Michele the bravo. Behold me now, nobly mounted and with forty gold ducats in my pocket, ambling alongside Michele the Captain of Horse!

Jacopo, our companion of that former night, had not kept pace with the procession of the years—he was still a courier; expected back that very night, Michele told me curiously, with most urgent dispatches from the south. Queer fellow, Jacopo, we agreed. For a long time now, he'd seemed to avoid me.

But there were so many in our cavalcade as to make his absence scarce noticeable. It was the custom in those days for invited guests to bring almost as much to a banquet as they expected to find there, and Cesare and his father were the most ostentatious of men. So ahead of us had jogged old Pietro, bearing a huge silver-mounted flask of rare wine from the Vatican cellars, and behind us, on mules, had toiled a crowd of singers and lutenists and fiddlers and men who could swallow fire. To the mocking moon—the same which had sneered down into that alley of the old plague quarter, while Cesare killed his brother—this escort of his must have looked indeed like the retinue of a king.

A long, long road! And little I guessed, even then, what the end of it was to be!

The eating part of the supper was over; the musicians were tuning their strings, the servants were fussing about the sideboards, decanting the rare wines the guests had brought, and I was notic-

ing how feeble and doddering old Pietro had grown lately—when I felt someone crowd roughly into a chair behind me, and heard a hoarse voice say:

"Arsenic, eh?"

I turned and confronted a man of about mine own age, dressed like me in the robes of a doctor, notable for having eyes set extremely close together, and evidently somewhat drunk. I had not seen him before—I suppose he had just arrived—and I had more than a suspicion that he was the doctor replacing me in the service of the Duke.

"Arsenic, eh?" says he again, sneering at me. "Well, well! The learned Messer Gaspare Torella went sniffing and listening and poking and prying—and diagnosed arsenic. Well, well!"

"Sir," I said, "I do not know you."

Turning away from him, I saw that the servants had the wine-cups filled and ranged on the sideboards and were waiting the signal of the major-domo to start making their rounds of the great folk. First, old Pietro would carry the Pope's guest-wine to Cardinal Corneto, our host; the while Corneto's cup-bearer took some choice vintage to His Holiness and Cesare. Pietro was twisting his fingers together as he awaited the signal; methought, he is past his duty, the campaigns have aged him; God send he stumble not and spill wine on the Cardinal or the Pope!

"I am Filippo Parisiani," says the hoarse voice in my ear, "a Doctor of Medicine of the University of Padua."

BEFORE I could turn again, a hand clutched my arm and wrenched me about. Now the face of this Parisiani was flushed with anger as well as with drink, and his black eyes were glittering with hate.

"And a better physician," says he, "than any Spaniard from Salamanca. So now!"

There was a tinkling of lutes, and one of the singers struck into a love-song. It happened to be one Agata had played and sung in those evenings of my convalescence at Nori; I did not want to quarrel with this drunkard.

"That's as may be," I said therefore. "In any case, I—am not in practice any more."

"Arsenic!" says he with contempt. "Any sow-butcher can diagnose arsenic. *Or mercury.*"

That struck home. My heart, that had swelled at Agata's song, now seemed to contract. And harden.

"But there be *some* of us," says Parisiani, "that have brains to see beyond the common metals. Aha, Master Lily-fingers! There are some of us, who if poisoning's to be done—"

"Hush!" I said to him, appalled. "Hush, for God's sake!"

"Hush *me?*" says he, suddenly savage, "Why, thou poor white-livered hedge-doctor, thou'd go to my master—*my* master, mark you, not thine!—bleating about arsenic as if I knew not my trade, when I've a dozen doses neither thou nor anybody else could fathom. Aye—whereof nobody knows the antidotes but myself!"

So poisoning was his trade; his that must have taken the oath of the healer. My gorge rose at him, and I made to move away, though still he gripped me. Our table was at the bottom of the hall; most that had eaten there had moved their chairs closer to the musicians; we were alone.

"Not so fast, Master Gaspare Torella," says the murderer. "Are not physicians sworn brothers?"

"By the oath thou'st boasted of breaking!" says I, wrenching my arm out of his clutch.

And as I did so, he swung his hand and struck me with all his power across the face.

"Call me a perjurer, wilt thou?" he cried. "Take that, then, coward!"

The singer had just reached a high note, and the lutes were in chorus about him, fluttering like doves.

And I knew I must now lead this Parisiani out into the gardens and kill him.

I said so, despite a horrible choking stiffness in my throat; and he seemed quite in accord—except that it was his intention, and always had been, to kill me. For this purpose, he had retained his sword. I had to borrow Michele da Corella's from the *garda-roba* where he

had left it. But no matter—before the singer had had time to begin another song, Parisiani and I were facing each other at swords'-points on the marble terrace in the moonlight.

It was full moon—just as it had been when Cesare, now drinking his royal wine, had spitted the Duke of Gandia, God rest him! And as our blades engaged, I wondered which of His Grace's servants would follow His Grace's brother up the ladder of moonbeams.

Parisiani, I felt in the first moments, was as good a swordsman as I, if not better, and I ceased to fret about fighting him when he had drink taken. Besides—does one inquire as to the health of a rat, before one kills him? And this false physician, this sneaking slayer, was vermin far more filthy.

"There's no antidote for my poisons, save what I give," he mocked me, "and for this there's no antidote at all. So—*ha!*"

HE meant to run me through the belly, but failed; and I did not at the moment attack him. This was my first chance to try the very reasonable theory of an old rogue who'd been killed at the storming of Citta di Castello—Battista of the One Thrust, he'd been called among the men. He was notably lazy, God receive his whiskered soul, and—

Sloth was not among the faults of Doctor Parisiani; he was on me like a madman. He drove me back against a balustrade of the loggia, and a tendril of a flowering vine fell across my face and he almost had me. But since every nerve I had was tuned to defense, and only to defense, I was enabled by heaven's grace to claw my way out of that death-trap.

"One of the Piacevoli, eh?" says he, meaning that I was one of the people who wear their hoods twisted up and eschew violence.

But his taunts could not affect me—until he should be more tired. And he would tire, the more quickly for the wine that was in him, the more quickly for the bars of light and shadow that the loggia cast across his eyes as he leaped forth and back from me.

Now I was entirely cold inside—I knew his tricks of fence, and cheap tricks they were, to be expected of a man who put poison in folks' wine-cups and had never stormed a breach. School-tricks, pretty to watch and deadly for the un-

"The Duke's poisoned," says Jacopo. "That old fool Pietro mixed the cups—"

learned, but taking more strength than they were worth. He tried them all, he tried them all, ha ha! And when he had tried them all and started all over again at the beginning, I thought it time to say something to him in my turn; hitherto I had fought in silence.

"If thou knowest any prayers," I told him, "it might be as well to say them now."

Instead of prayers, he burst out into the most awful blasphemy. There was sweat on his forehead—it gleamed greenish in the moonlight—and I suppose he felt the death-dew springing between his palm and the sword-hilt. Aye—at a strong parry I felt his blade waver against mine; at the next, his wrist was soft; and when he took the guard-position again, his point was a hand's breadth out of position. As old dead Battista of the One Thrust had told me it must be, sooner or later. . . .

To my aid, ghost of that old soldier! The clean steel against the poison-brew!

I leaped in, pushed Parisiani's sword aside with my left arm, and gave him three inches of blade just upward through the arch of the ribs.

"*Diavolo!*" he choked—calling on his master in the moment of going to him! His knees gave way, he doubled forward and fell against my ankles in a heap.

In that instant, I heard cryings and hubbub from the banquet-hall behind me.

Immediately, a man came rushing into the loggia all aghast, crying with all his lungs for Messer Parisiani—the Duke's physician—Messer Parisiani, in the name of God!

It was Jacopo the courier; and when he saw me and the dead man at my feet, he stopped short in his tracks, mouth open in horror and his eyes showing their whites.

"What's to do?" I demanded of him, dropping my sword and starting for the door of the banquet-hall. "Is the Duke ill? Is it His Holiness?"

JACOPO gripped me by the shoulder, still staring at Parisiani's corpse.

Now new shouts rose within the hall—where was His Grace's doctor?—Parisiani, Parisiani!—and running feet approached the loggia.

At the sound, Jacopo seemed to awake as from a nightmare; with dreadful strength thrust me off the porch into the shrubbery and jumped down after me himself.

"Silence—silence!" he gasped, as though he'd been running a race. "Both our throats cut—"

"But if the Duke's ill—"

"The Duke's poisoned," says Jacopo. "That old fool Pietro mixed the cups—Cesare's stabbed him—'twas Parisiani's poison—for the Cardinal—the Pope's drugged, too."

"Let me go!" I cried, struggling with him, but he held me with a grip of iron.

"Stay still, thou young fool! Thou'st no help for them, and Cesare knows it. Only Parisiani hath—*had* the counter-poison—didn't I bring him from Padua? Boasting all the way . . . And thou'st killed him, my God, my God!"

"I can try—"

"The Duke'd stab thee, soon's he knew—like Pietro—I've injured thee before; I'll not have that. Thou must go—flee—be out of Rome this night! Come—my horse is tethered—"

"I'll not go! I'll go to the Duke! Am I to desert him now, in his hour of need?"

I tore myself free and stood upright. So did Jacopo, his lips pressed together.

I saw him lean toward me, as it were; and then the whole world seemed to explode in a great flash of light—and I woke up in a plain room that smelled of garlic. I was lying on a quilt on a board floor, and my hands felt three times their ordinary size, and sunlight was coming in through the window.

Jacopo was still with me—kneeling by my side and flinging water into my face from an earthen bowl.

"What—what—"

He sat back on his hams and stared at me.

"Thank God for so much," says he, crossing himself. "I thought I'd killed thee."

The knuckles of his right hand were wrapped in a bloody rag. Suddenly I remembered—

"The Duke!" I cried, sitting up.

"What of the Duke? His Holiness?"

"They'll both die," says Jacopo, "and naught thou can do about it. May be dead now. Hark!"

Through the little low window came the roar of a crowd. Somewhere close at hand, a troop of cavalry (by the sound of it) went across cobblestones at the gallop. Someone shrieked.

"They think the Pope's dead already, and the scum of Rome is out for the looting," said the courier. "Corella's men have fired on a crowd in front of the Vatican; the Orsini faction's risen against the Borgias, and Michele's set fire to their palace on Montegiordano."

"Where am I?"

"Thou'rt in the attic of my sweetheart's house," says Jacopo, "and hell's own work I had to get thee here. While I had thee lying dead-like out there in the shrubbery, out comes the Duke Cesare, holding his throat and shouting a thousand ducats reward for thy head. He'd heard of thy quarrel and found Parisiani, and knew his own doom . . . There's patrols all over Rome by this time, after thy blood."

Never had I known the Duke to offer a reward in vain. . . .

"Look you," says Jacopo desperately, "keep close—I must show myself, and it may be I'll be sent on some message. Maria will bring thee food—zounds, that a woman should have got me soft enough to risk my neck thus! And when chance offers to slip out of Rome, begone, for God's mercy! If I'm here, I'll help thee—come, courage, lad! Thou'lt live, and maybe—maybe see—"

He stopped and licked his lips, looking at me in a strange humble way.

"—maybe see," he got out at last, "thy—lady Agata again."

"*Agata?*"

He nodded.

"But—but she's—"

He shook his head.

"She's alive?" I cried; and again he nodded.

"'TWAS the Duke's order," he said huskily. "Forgive me, young master! I always liked thee, but—the Duke, thou knowest! He wanted thee for a tame pet, like them gib-cats; and besides, he wouldn't be countered. I—he took that letter of thine, and burned it; and I told her thou'd—died in the plague at Imola. I told Maria and she said it would bring a curse on us . . . Forgive me, Master Gaspare! Put no curse on Maria and me!"

"Is she—still unwed?"

"No, she's a widow— Oh, ye mean the lady Agata! Aye, she's maiden—grieving for thee, God help me! I've stopped by, whiles, to—maybe drink a cup, but to tell her comfortable lies as well. And I saved thy life last night. Gaspare, curse me not!"

"Not—thy fault," I choked out somehow. I gave him my hand. The curses that seemed to be fuming up within me were not for him, but for his master—my master that had been, who had smiled and cozened and done this to me for his whim.

"Rage not against the Duke neither," says Jacopo. "God's stricken him harder than ever thou couldst—and thy work's to get out of Rome alive—and to the young lady. Then—better get out of Italy. The Borgias have a long arm!"

"Thou said they were dead—dying—"

"'Tis said so—but with *him*, who knows? I'll bring thee news as I can; keep close, and at the first chance flee for thy life!"

He left me a prey to rage that seemed to corrode my vitals; and came back after three days, during which time I was frugally fed by his Maria. A dumpy little thing was she, to have made a lamb out of that leopard Jacopo!

But there was leopard in him still—and blood on his claws when he came back to me. On his sword, I mean, and his dagger and his clothes.

"Michele da Corella sent me to summon troops from Ceri. They'll not budge; say the Pope's dead and to hell with Valentino—they've not been paid. And the peasants on the way back set on me and nigh tore me to pieces—thought I was a tax-officer. Corella's put knife to the throat o' the Pope's chamberlain and robbed him o' two hundred thousand ducats in gold, but the Orsini are fighting and there's riots in Perugia—Cesena—everywhere. That

mad priest Girolamo's turned coat and's arguing the people to revolt. . . . The Pope *is* dead."

"What of—what of Cesare?"

"He's living, but deathly sick—they say all his skin's come off. Whether or no—master, his Duchy's come off; the folk have risen and the troops won't put 'em down— It's all up with Cesare Borgia. Tricks like he played thee, he's played everyone high and low—everyone hates him, and now he's down—"

"He said—he said his empire would last a thousand years! 'Tis impossible—"

"So it might—if Pietro had not mixed the cups. As it is—Gaspare, save thyself! No Borgia man is safe in Italy now!"

"What of thee?"

"I'm not a Spaniard. I've a horse for thee, and Maria's brother is sergeant of the guard tonight at the Porta Santa Maria Novella. Wilt try for thy life when it gets dark?"

Yes, yes, said my reason, but my heart was reluctant.

"Jacopo—is it certain—is it sure—that there's naught I can do for His Highness? As a physician—"

Jacopo got up and fairly tore his hair.

"As a physician—God's wounds, art thou mad? Hath Cesare bewitched thee? Robs thee of three years o' thy girl's life—she might have broke her heart and died indeed, or gone into a nunnery—and thou still— Don't I tell thee, he'd rip thy guts with his dagger, sick as he is? And there's a thousand ducats on thy head for any spy to snatch, and—and thou'lt ride tonight or I wash my hands of thee!"

I went.

At a hilltop on the northward road, I turned and looked back through the waning moonlight, upon Rome.

There was the dome of St. Peter's, gleaming; there the armor of the sentries still twinkling on the Castel Sant' Angelo by the bridge-barred stream; there the Vatican, where the lord of my last six years lay in peril of his lordship and fighting for his very life.

Had he bewitched me? I do not know. All I do know is—that for all the bitter wrong he had done me, I could not make my heart hard against him. 'Twas heavily that I rode away from his trouble, heavily that I said to myself, over and again, aloud:

"*Fiasco!* Finished! That's my last sight of Rome and Cesare Borgia!"

CHAPTER XVIII

DIE BY THE SWORD

AS TO Rome, I was not mistaken.

As to Cesare Borgia—the end was not yet.

I have wondered often since—was he prophetic when he told me that our stars were commingled? I have cast his horoscope and mine, and I cannot see the connection; yet—along with so many gifts desired by men—beauty, wealth, noble birth—the gift of prophecy may indeed have been his.

Once he prophesied that some day Italy, maybe all the nations of the world, will be as one. May it prove true! But I believe that if it falls to any mortal man to redress the injustices and right the wrongs of this world and bring brotherhood to man, 'twill fall to one who can bring these things about without aid of lying, fraud, oppression, corruption and murder.

All of which Cesare had dealt in, as I have shown. And now—while I rode north to Agata—the mighty fabric he had reared collapsed under the weight of them.

I had planned to stop in Siena, and thence send him back a message asking could I not still help him in his extremity; aye, aye—our stars must have been commingled indeed. But I found Siena, that had crawled to the Duke after the massacres of Sinigaglia and Assisi, now howling with revolt; it would have been my life's value to seek a courier on Borgia affairs.

Skirting the city, and in terror lest my Spanish accent should betray me to the very peasants, I heard that Gianpaolo Baglioni, saved by his illness from death at Sinigaglia, had raised the standard of rebellion. At Empoli, where I arrived exhausted and a woman tavern-keeper hid and fed me for the love of God, there was news that Urbino had

risen and butchered the Borgia troops, that Giovanni Sforza was back at Pesaro, that Rimini and Camerino and Castello had their tyrants again, and that all these bloody men had sworn a league against Cesare.

I remember I put my head down on the tavern table and wept.

"What's the matter?" asked the woman, standing by me with her arms akimbo. "Was he kind to thee?"

"No—yes—no—"

"Ah!" says the woman—she looked something like Cesare's mother, broad faced and sturdy. "But *I* know! I know that kind of fellow, lad. I married one of 'em once, though he was a ploughman instead of a Duke, and I tell thee, none such is worth anybody's tears."

I was moved to defend him—defend the Duke of the Romagna, Captain-General of Holy Church, there in that country inn.

"His plan was perfect!" I told the woman. "You do not know! Had not he and His Holiness been—fallen ill at the same time—"

"But they did, didn't they?"

Aye, they had. Because an old servant mistook one cup for another. Because....

The woman took *my* cup, walked to the door and flung its few remaining drops out into the dust.

THIS is not my story, so I will not waste ink over my coming to Nori, and Agata's joy and our marriage by Fra Tommaso (still as pig-headed as ever in his belief that mosquitoes caused malaria) and our leaving Italy for Viana. The French rule from Milan was not to old Nori's taste, and he came with us, saying he had little thought ever to have a Borgia adherent for a son-in-law, but giving a hundred ducats from a little store he had, to pay for our traveling and to establish me in practice.

Mine own parents were not without influence in the district—their parents, and their parents' parents, had owned most of it under Spanish rule, and among Spaniards a name continues to mean something, even when it hath lost its significance on a banker's books.

So by the year 1507 I was thriving—not in Viana itself, but in the countryside among the peasants Agata so loved. They would have none of my new-fangled medicines; but at Agata's behest I made decoctions of rubbish and gave them the ointment of snakes' bones and the three drops of blood from a black cat's tail which they demanded, and we all throve together.

"Canst not push mankind ahead faster than it will go," said old Nori, nodding comfortably in his armchair in the sun.

I had learned that—and all the news I had of my former master confirmed the lesson.

The King of France had accused him of treachery in the Naples war, and taken away his Dukedom; there was a new Pope, Julius, that had been Cardinal della Rovere—the same that had fawned on us when we had landed at Marseille—and he had dismissed Cesare from the Captaincy of the Church. I heard dimly that the Duke had been in prison, even—at Chinchilla—and had escaped and been taken again and flung in a dungeon like a pickpocket.

I could not believe it. His Grace, His Lordship, His Highness that had been so glorious and gay!

But for all that I went mumchance about my visits until one day Agata put her arms about my neck and said:

"Gaspare: if thou must worry—worry about—thy son."

"My son?"

She put her face on my shoulder, and I stood there speechless and as it were beatified, while old Nori, who thought human emotions were somewhat low, took up the tale, grumbling:

"Aye, thy son, Doctor Blind Man. With Beaumonts and Agramontes fighting all over the countryside and the King going to take a hand in it soon, there's more to fear for any babe, born or unborn, than for thy Borgia in his cell—God rot him in it! Wilt quit this hugging and kissing and tell me—hast heard that Louis de Beaumont hath taken Viana Castle and defied His Majesty?"

I had not; 'twas old Nori who spent his drowsy afternoons in the wine-shop, where the country-folk treated him almost as though he were King of Navarre

himself; and where the couriers stopped for a drink.

"What of that?" says Agata, pushing me away and smiling and wiping her eyes. "The Beaumonts have had it before—and then the Agramontes and then the Beaumonts again—what difference hath it ever made to us?"

"Ah—but this time," says the old man with importance, "King Jean hath lost patience. Sending an army to deal with 'em both, he is. Ten thousand men, with cannon and a Captain-General, the post says. And about time, too. Maybe we shall be able to hear the guns. Authority must be upheld—'twas weakness that overthrew the Visconti and let in those damned Sforzas—and the French—and that Borgia—"

We did hear the rumble of the guns, day in, day out, in those first weeks of February.

But that was not all we were to hear of the siege of Viana.

ON THE eleventh of the month, as I was lancing a boil on the neck of a cowherd, there came from the village street a great and unaccustomed noise of shod hoofs. I went to the window, lancet in hand—and there behold a squadron of cavalry, guided by a yokel who was pointing to my house!

A foreboding fell upon me. I thanked God that Agata was not at home—she had left that very morning, for a visit to my mother, and old Nori was at the village inn, telling ploughmen of the glories of the Visconti.

I went to the door, and a bearded sergeant, about to knock, changed the motion of his hand and saluted.

"Doctor Gaspare Torella?"

"That is my name."

"Sorry to interrupt business, Doctor—I see Your Honor is busy—"

"I am, and the patient awaits me."

"So does my master, and impatiently at that. And perchance he's more important than thy present vic—patient, Doctor, being Captain General of the army of His Majesty the King of Navarre, whom God preserve!"

He took his hat off and put it on again. So did all the men.

I stood staring at him, and I knew—I knew!

"What," says I, "is his—"

"His illness? Ah, that's for you to say; been peaking and pining ever since 'a joined us—beg pardon, took command."

"What," I began again, "is his name?"

"Oh, his name! I thought everybody knew—seeing he's the King's brother-in-law, even if he hath—His name's Cesare Borgia."

Our stars commingled!

"I'll—I'll not go!"

The sergeant nodded.

"Captain said Your Honor might feel so; wherefore, I'm first to give Your Worship assurance of safety, and if that's not enough—why, I'm to bring you, bag, brains and breeches across-saddle. Saving your presence, and hoping 'twon't be necessary."

It was not necessary.

I bandaged the gaping cowherd (he hath never paid me for the lancing, to this day) mounted a led horse they had for me, and, giving old Nori the news in his wine-shop, started for Viana. In my mind's eye, I can still see my father-in-law, God rest him!—standing in the middle of the road with his white hair flying, wringing his hands and adjuring the peasants to rescue me with pitchforks.

"How did the Duke find me?" I asked the sergeant on the way.

"The Duke? Oh, the Captain! Why—seems thou'd told him thou came from hereabouts; he's had patrols scouring the landscape for thee, these ten days."

Patrols had hunted me in Rome. . . .

"Sounds bad," says I, with a false laugh.

The sergeant looked sidewise at me.

"No need to fear him," he said sombrely, "'a's a sick man if ever I saw one. O' course—riding to the wars at his age—"

"His age?"

"Why, yes. 'A's fifty or so, isn't he?"

My heart chilled. Cesare was—

"He's thirty-two."

"Thirty— Well, damme," says the sergeant, "he must have had a hard life."

And he had; and he showed it. Never shall I forget my sick feeling as I approached the bed in the headquarters of

the besiegers, and saw that the gray-haired man lying thereon was indeed my former master.

He was still well-fleshed as he had been, and seemed strong—the hand he stretched forth clasped mine with the remembered warmth and vigor, but the grip soon relaxed, and—

HIS face! His eyes!

From nostril to mouth-corner, on either side, ran deep creases; the laughter-lines that had been on his cheeks were all gone; and the blue of those eyes of his seemed to have bleached to the gray of desolation and despair.

"Well, Gaspare," says he—and tried to laugh. "We meet again. After how many years is it? A hundred?"

"Four, Your Grace."

Now he did laugh—a terrible sound.

"'Your Grace'! Long since I've heard that. And yet, Gaspare—if I had not been laid by at the same time as my father—look you, I had provided against everything but that! Listen to me, Gaspare: thou knowest how I was fortified all over the Romagna—I need not explain to thee as I must to these apes at the court of my brother-in-law. In another year, they would have come to love me—the common people—I would have relaxed the laws—the harshness was only while I was building the kingdom. Who could have foreseen—what in the name of God were the chances against it?—that we should both be ill together? That old fool Pietro—"

He burst forth into the most horrible cursings of his murdered servant; and in the midst stumbled over words with his tongue; passed his hand over his eyes, and lay silent.

"Doctor," says he at last, "I'm weary. I have much in my mind with this government—"

"This government, Your Highness?"

"I—I mean—this siege. What did I say? Ah, government. I am busy continually with plans—all this business in the Romagna, this revolt, this rebellion, this return of the tyrants—certainly the peasants must want me back— My cousin of France and I could—"

His voice trailed away. He still kept his hand over his eyes.

"I think—I think I may be ill, Gaspare."

"I have no doubt of it, Your Grace."

Now he took his hand away, looked at me and began to unlace the bosom of his shirt. . . .

I cannot, because of my oath as a physician, tell what ill I found in him. I sought diligently not to find it, but—I had seen the like too many times before. I had my certainty before ever I

MURDER IN THE FAMILY

"Dear Copper: I don't want trouble with you. So take your foot in your hand and get back to Broadway where you belong. . . ." Thus ran the note left by mobster Dixie DeJong, after he'd bushwhacked Lieutenant Marquis of the Broadway Squad on the Long Island estate where the Marquis had trailed him. But, with badge and gun missing—and reputation at stake—the little czar of Mazda Lane picked himself up and went on to the craziest kill sequence of his fabled career. It's JOHN LAWRENCE'S latest action-packed Marquis of Broadway novelette.

Inspector Allhoff, D. L. CHAMPION'S legless coffee-bibber of Centre Street, is back to *Tell It to Homicide* in no uncertain terms, when those flies in his ointment—Simmonds and Battersly—try to horn in on his own private murder. Just to add to his misery, he's sick in bed when the corpse occurs on his office floor—and the Doc has curtailed the supply of his favorite brew!

Then there's a Max Latin novelette by NORBERT DAVIS, a Colonel Kaspir story by C. P. DONNEL, Jr., and other good shorts and features. This great MAY issue is on sale NOW!

10c DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

looked at his eye-pupils or put hand to the tendon of his knee.

It had been late when I reached his bedside. It was dawn, and the candles were guttering—as they had guttered at Assisi, that morning he fought the Orsini!—before I would answer his question.

"I'm to die—not so? God's wounds, man, dost think I'm afraid of death? Tell me: yes or no?"

I nodded my head; and, though he had expected the answer, he drew the breath sharply in through his teeth.

"So," says he, tying up his shirt again. "And how soon, Doctor? Quickly or slowly?"

"I— I—"

"Slowly, eh?"

He had his shirt tied now, and sat with his hands on his knees. His sword—that same sword I had seen hanging under the map of Italy in the Vatican ten years agone!—was lying on a table by the bed; he reached and took it and bent the blade between his hands and looked at me.

"Not that, Sire! Your Grace may have years yet—"

"Years of what?"

I could not answer him.

"I remember," says Cesare slowly, "a certain Count Accorsi, in Rome."

I remembered him too. Horror!

"Rather than that, methinks—"

THERE was a trumpet blown, far away. In an instant, his eyes brightened, he sprang to his feet and stood listening. As, down the street, there came the sound of galloping horsemen, he moved toward his armor—and away again.

"An alarm?" says he, looking at me with a strange smile. "Why—"

There were feet on the staircase now, and a voice shouting at the sentry:

"Out of my way! News for the Captain!"

Cesare flung the door open.

"Captain—they've got a convoy of food into the fortress—"

"Who the devil art thou?"

"Reinforcements, sir; Sergeant Gomez. We saw the convoy escort retreating as the sun rose, but 'twas too strong for us to attack—"

"How many?"

"A hundred horse at least—and we're but fifty."

Cesare struck him a blow in the face that knocked the man staggering against a wall.

"Cowardly dog!" he roared. "Give the alarm again! Sentry—turn out the guard! How far's this convoy by now, milk-guts?"

Spitting out teeth, the wretch lisped something about a quarter of a mile.

"We'll see," says Cesare, starting down the stair.

His horse, as a commander's always must be, was tethered outside the door; and, unarmored though he was, though sword in hand, he vaulted into the saddle in a moment.

"Cesare—master!" I cried to him; and as he struck heels into the horse's ribs, he smiled down at me and waved his hand.

Then he was gone, at breakneck pace down the street toward the gate. I ran after him, stumbling on the cobbles and crying out I know not what; but by the time I reached the gate, he was far away, flying across the plain toward that escort.

Breathless, I turned and scrambled up the narrow stair to the ramparts—I could see better from there, alongside the sentries who were huddled together, leaning on their halberds and watching that mad ride.

"Is 't the Captain?" says one.

"If 'tis, he's a dead man," says another. "Look!"

Cesare's sword was flashing in the rays of the rising sun. He was waving it over his head, and to my ears came a thin, faraway shouting. I could not make out the words—it must have been some battle-cry.

The retreating convoy pursued its way—but now I saw a dozen men drop out of the rear rank, wheel their horses and ride back toward my master. They were old soldiers—I could see that by the way they kept formation. They started slowly, increased pace to a trot, a canter, and then with a yell they were on him at the gallop.

They smote him as one man, and his horse went down, and I thought never to see him alive again.

But when the melee cleared, there he was—afoot, fighting with two fellows in armor, who had likewise been dismounted. They were pressing him hard, and the men that had remained ahorseback were circling about, looking for a chance to cut him down.

He thrust, and one of his adversaries staggered backward. He left the other footman for an instant, and slipped steel into one of the riders. Down went that one, and with the back-handed stroke he had used on Francesco Orsini, he hewed down the fellow he had spared before.

Now there was more shouting and the cavalrymen drew away from him—I could hear the bull voice of one of them counselling some maneuver. They separated into two parties—four or five men in each, against one afoot, unarmored!—and, front and back of Cesare Borgia, they closed in.

He was invisible in the circle of horses—I saw mailed arms rise and fall, rise and fall—and then the horsemen reined back, turned and galloped after the convoy.

Something white lay still in the place where they had been. That was all.

One of the sentries spat over the parapet.

"Now somebody," says he, as the pursuit-squadron thundered out of the gateway, "will have to go and fetch him in."

I FETCHED him in—I, Gaspare Torella, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Salamanca, fetched in what was left of Cesare Borgia de France, Duke of Valentinois, Duke of the Romagna, Lord of Fermo, Count of Cesena—

These titles swim before my eyes, for some reason. There were many more of them; he had lost them all. And besides he was very bloody and covered in mud and all his clothes had been torn from him. I washed him with my own hands and wrapped him in a shroud so that he should be decent when King Jean came to bury him (as was done) in the Church of Santa Maria.

For my trouble, and my fee for reading the death-warrant to a person so distinguished, I took Cesare's sword, which was still clasped tightly in his hand when I found him; that blade engraved (it will be remembered) with the motto:

AVT CAESAR AVT NIHIL

Caesar—or nothing.

I have it still; it lies on the table before me as I write. But Agata hath thrown across its blue steel some swaddling of our first grandchild.

So the generations come and go, and so return the children of men!

Of that motto which was to have served for Cesare's brave new world; which was to excuse his treacheries, his murders and—his glories; the soft-folding baby-cloth conceals all but one word:

NIHIL

Nothing. . . .

WHALE HUNTERS OF THE HUDSON RIVER

A FACT STORY

By

BRIAN O'BRIEN

IN THE Spring of 1783 the patroons of Dutchess County, New York looked over their long pipes to where low, bluff bowed, greasy ships with smoke-blackened sails tacked across the river towards their shore.

"Likely some Frenchie trick," they mumbled and hurriedly ran to get their long guns.

But the strangers, when they rowed ashore, proved to be lean, bronzed Yankees followed by tall women and shrill brown children.

"Whalers!" the patroons shouted unbelievingly.

"What in the world are whalers doing a hundred and twenty miles from the sea?"

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

The boat turned in ahead of the flukes. . . .

. . . . *and the boatsteerer darted his iron.*

WHEN Paul Revere had made his famous ride eight years before, he carried more than news of the redcoats. He carried the most important American trade to the Hudson River.

The whalers of Nantucket were aiding the colonists with gunpowder. But Nantucket was eighty miles from the mainland and cut off from all aid against privateers and the King's ships. Some moved to the Carolinas, some to Virginia. But Seth and Tom Jenkins tacked their slab sided blubber hunters under the Palisades, past the wide reach of Nyack, past the islands to Poughkeepsie. Tom liked that port, but his brother explored further up the lovely river. And in a deep stretch, well wooded, with plenty of anchorage for a large fleet, he decided on Claverack Landing. Along the bank the Dutchmen watched them.

"These be good farmers, Tom," Seth argued. "What better neighbors? Whale oil for their lamps, stores for us. Timber for our spars against spermaceti for their candles."

So the brothers bought land and settled their wives and families. Then they broke out their anchors and sailed away. The following spring the river saw a sturdy fleet of brigs, sloops and ships, black and smoky, with gun ports painted on their sides to scare off the privateers.

The Yankees brought their homes with them too; sturdy frames of Nantucket houses built to weather the bleak nor'easters. Swiftly they erected them, swiftly they sent boats down river for the sparkling Esopus water that is better than any other for a long voyage because it stays alive in any cask.

They wasted little time. As soon as their craft were provisioned by the thrifty farmers they sailed again, leaving their wives and children to build more houses, many of which can still be seen, white and neat against the deep green of Catskill foliage. They built a school, a Quaker meetinghouse, and beside the river they erected ways for more whalers.

Claverack Landing became Hudson and in two years the city was incorporated and had a fleet of twenty-five sail on the high seas, chasing the spermaceti. The Jenkins brothers built a candle works for their head-matter and Hudson thrived. Captain Solomon Bunker brought to Hudson the biggest cargo of sperm oil ever landed in the United States!

Then Poughkeepsie came in. Newark had a few whalers, as did New York and Greenpoint. They had such famous vessels as the brig *Liberty, Volunteer, Diana, Juno, James Munroe.*

Greasy with the gurry of hundreds of cuttings-in, their sails black with smoke from the try-works, stinking the river for miles and their hands full of devilment from four year cruises to the lonely wastes of the world's oceans.

In 1797 Hudson missed being the capital of New York State by one vote!

About this time Jefferson decided no American ship could trade with foreigners. England declared contraband any ship dealing with France or her allies. And Napoleon threatened to seize any ship entering or leaving a British port. So the Hudson whalers rode at anchor under the Catskills until times should improve. The War of 1812 made matters worse and the ships rotted at their anchorages, secure only from the British fleet that harried the New England whalers.

In 1830 a few old blubber hunters decided to try their luck again. They organized the Hudson Whaling Company, sent off their ships and returned safely with hundreds of barrels of oil. Newburgh and Poughkeepsie saw profit returning in the oily vessels that sailed past their wharves, and in 1832 they formed the Poughkeepsie Whaling Company "for the purpose of engaging in the Whale Fisheries in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and Elsewhere, and the Manufacture of Oil and Spermaceti Candles."

One of the directors of the new company was Matthew Vassar who founded a college with his profits and helped finance the brig *Vermont.* Then Troy businessmen took a hand and formed the Dutchess Whaling Company. All this 120 miles from the sea!

But they couldn't earn profit without tragedy.

IN 1832 the *Vermont*, Captain Norton, heaved short and drifted into the current off Poughkeepsie.

"Greasy luck!" shouted the crews of vessels at anchor.

Steering south she took several whales on the Brazil Banks, sold over $16,000 worth of oil, rounded the Horn and took 600 barrels on the Chile Grounds.

They picked up a green hand, a Portugee, and that was a mistake. He didn't know futtock shrouds from the martingale, but he knew enough to be a mean sea lawyer in the fo'c'sle. He soldiered, stole from his mates and was generally hated.

"One hunder' twentieth lay," he'd grumble. "Cap'n steal ever'tin'."

"Stow yer gab," said a boy. "You ain't entitled to any more."

"You talk me, I cutta yo' neck," flashed the dark one.

So it went. He crawled through the lubber's hole like a cat on a wet tree when the others danced over the futtocks. At lookout in the rings he hung on like grim death and spewed dismally over the deck far below.

"Ain't no more use than a parson," grunted the third mate. "Can't reef nor steer, can't lay eyes on a whale, can't pull a boat. I wisht he'd drop overboard."

Next time they lowered for a whale the Portugee refused to go.

"All right," the captain threatened. "You go ashore at the next port o' call."

Luckily he didn't see the man spit through his crossed fingers at him.

It was a sweltering day west of the Galapagos Islands and the Portugee was

The mate gave him twenty-five lashes with a salt-hardened cord.

caught in the glory hole robbing a boatsteerer's chest. That's a black crime in any ship. But in a whaler where men have to live cramped together for three-four years, it's a quick form of suicide.

The captain caught the third mate dragging him through the booby hatch.

"Trice him up to the standing gear," he ordered. "I'll teach him a lesson he won't forget."

Swift hands made his wrists fast beside the cutting-stage and word was passed for the mate.

"Lay on twenty-five," ordered the captain.

And the mate gave him twenty-five lashes with a salt hardened, fish-line hand-cord that left him foaming and screaming dirt and prayers at the same time. They cut him down and soused clean salt water over his back. And he lay eyeing the skipper like a split shark.

No whales were sighted for a few days and the *Vermont* was changing course for the Off Shore Grounds. The mate's and second mate's watches had been stowing down and coopering all day and were for taking their rest in the dusk.

The helmsman saw Captain Norton go for'd of the midship house. There was a sudden shout, a long groan and the captain dropped to the deck. The helmsman couldn't make out what had happened but he sang out for the mate who ran for'd.

"Why it's that damned Portugee," he roared.

Then there was a yell. Someone shouted and a hand sang out: "Man overboard!"

"He's cut me!" shouted the mate. "Get the old man below! Back the mains'l. I'll hang that devil!"

The helmsman peered through the skylight to where they'd laid Captain Norton on the cabin table. He died as they worked on him. Meanwhile the second mate's boat was away and though they searched for hours they never found that Portugee. The sharks attended to that.

They buried Captain Norton on Charles Island, and the *Vermont* went back to Poughkeepsie with a sad story. She sailed again the following year but never did very well after that. She was wrecked off the St. Paul Islands in the year 1847.

THE whaleship *Meteor*, Captain Clasby, sailed from Hudson in 1830. Clasby was a good master and popular with his crew; he'd worked his way from green hand through boatsteerer, third, second and mate to master. He cruised the Indian Ocean Grounds and veered across to the Cape of Good Hope.

Just where the terrible thing happened isn't certain, but there came a fine morning when the foremast lookout yelled: "Bl-o-ws! There she blo-o-ws!"

"Where away?" shouted Clasby from the deck.

Then the mate in the mainmast rings sighted the spout.

"Blo-o-ws! Ah, blo-o-ws. Sperm whale, two points off the lee bow. 'Bout two miles. Ah! There she breaches! Whitewaters! Whitewaters!"

"Larboard boats away!"

Quick as a flash the mate and second mate were lowered. Crews tumbled into the slim whaleboats, set sails and bowled towards where that whale blew and breached as if there hadn't been a whale ship within a hundred miles.

Clasby watched them from the maintop, their jibs dragging them like gulls over the high, green combers.

"Flukes! There go flukes!"

The mighty tail, symmetrical as a Chinese fan, tilted out of the water and disappeared, leaving a broad slick of oil from the whale's skin. The two boats sailed on, following that slick and waiting for the beast to reappear. They unshipped oars and paddled quietly so as not to gally the whale when he breached to spout. Slowly the *Meteor* ghosted down on the boats.

"Blo-o-ws!"

A plume of spray came from ahead of the mate's boat. The boatsteerer stood up as the midship oar took in sail and shipped the mast.

Suddenly something enormous and black broke water beside the tiny, white boat. The mate heaved on his steering oar and the boat turned in ahead of the flukes. The boatsteerer darted his iron, snatched a second and planted that.

"He's fast!"

Swiftly the boat backed away and the boatsteerer danced over the thwarts to take the steering oar while the mate passed him to the bow, reaching for a lance.

Suddenly the boat jerked like a chip as it straightened out behind the mighty beast that was running like a steamboat.

"Leggo t'gallants," yelled Clasby as the boat dwindled behind the rolling seas.

The *Meteor* took on speed and the second mate's boat drew alongside and was hauled aboard.

"Flukes!" called the lookout.

And they ran close enough to see the hands in the mate's boat heaving like mad on the whale line while the mate stood in the bows, lance poised to search for the whale's life.

"Look out—flukes!"

The frantic scream from the masthead was too late. The boat tilted as the whale came up under it. His great flukes reared thirty feet in air and came down like the crack of doom.

"Lower," called Clasby.

The second mate's boat slapped into the water as the great tail thrashed again, staving the mate's boat and leaving his men clinging to wreckage or swimming for their lives. Then the whale sounded.

"Two miles of line and all gear lost," grumbled the mate, shaking water out of his ears.

The shattered boat was hauled aboard and set on the midship gallows for repair. It was getting dark. Suddenly the lookout yelled again.

"Breaches! There he pitchpoles!"

Clasby made out the enormous case of the sperm whale bobbing like a buoy a quarter mile away.

"Same whale," said the mate. "He's a fighter. They always pitchpoles like that to look 'round for suthin' to smash."

"I'll give him that," said Clasby. "Lower the starb'd boat."

"Ye can't lower in the dark, man."

But the boat was in the water and the crew in their places.

"Give way all." The captain sculled the great steering sweep.

They ran up to the slick near where the whale had now disappeared.

"Line floating," reported the boatsteerer.

"Haul it in."

Swiftly they peaked oars and hauled on the line.

"Back all," roared Clasby suddenly. "Breaches!"

The slim boat foamed through the darkening water and the great, stinking carcass rose, rolling and thrashing.

"Lay me closer," yelled the boatsteerer. "Wood to blackskin. I'll find his life with an iron."

He darted an iron up to the hitches in the black side.

"Stern all!"

Vapor, hot and sticky, covered them as the beast rolled. The boatsteerer tumbled aft and Clasby took his place.

"He's sounding."

At that moment a bight of line caught the captain's ankle and he was twitched overboard in a flash.

Desperately the men hauled on the line, but it ran out of the midship tub quick and smoking. The boatsteerer with canvas palms tried to snub the line around the stern loggerhead, but the boat soused into rising combers as the whale sounded deep below them. Then darkness fell with tropic suddenness.

"Heave away, he's coming up."

The harpooner snatched a lance as the hands took in the slack line. Then with a who-o-osh the whale breached somewhere ahead.

"Lay me on him," whispered the harpooner. "Three seas closer."

The boat crept to within two fathoms of the whale.

The mate drove the six foot lance deep into the monster's flank, churning madly, searching for the lungs.

Then there was a mighty grunt and blood splashed on the men. The great, square head rose out of the water, its long scissor-like jaws clashing in the darkness.

"Stern all!"

They listened to the dying flurry of the beast as it churned bloodstained water about them.

"Fin out," called the bow oar at last. "My gawd!"

They pulled close. Pinned to the black hide was the body of Captain Clasby, wrapped close by lines that had, by the rolling of the monster, dragged him to his death. Carefully he was cut away and the whale towed to the *Meteor* for cutting in.

Thus another mighty hunter from the Hudson met his death in tropic waters far from the peaceful reaches of the Catskills.

ONE of the few survivors of the most tragic story of whaling was a Hudson man; Captain Benjamin Lawrence.

In 1819, as a youth, he was a boatsteerer in the ill-fated *Essex*. She was a three boater of 250 tons with a crew of twenty under Captain Pollard who commanded the starboard boat. The larboard boat was under Owen Chase, the mate, and the waist boat, Matthew Joy, second mate.

Sailing from Nantucket, August 12th, 1819, the *Essex* cruised the St. Helena Grounds, took whales off Tristan da Cunha and Patagonia, then rounded Cape Horn to try the Pacific. She reached the Galapagos for a supply of turtles a little over a year later, half full and only a third of her cruise completed. Taking 300 turtles they steered west in what is now called the Off Shore Grounds.

November 20th, 1820, fifteen months from home, spouts were raised; there was a large pod of whales spouting and breaching about a mile to leeward.

The captain ordered the ship ahead of the slowly moving beasts so he could lower "head to" on them, thus giving every boat a chance for a kill.

Quietly the three boats were lowered and they paddled towards the oncoming whales. The mate approached the largest, sliding alongside the great rock-like mass of bone and blubber.

"Closer, closer," whispered the boatsteerer.

He stood up, balancing in the tossing boat, then, with all his strength, darted his iron into the whale's flank.

"Stern all," called the mate, running forward for the lance.

But this whale was a fighter and instead of plunging forward after being harpooned he milled and rolled fiercely, threshing with his flukes until the men were choking with spray.

"Look out for flukes!"

But the great tail rose over the boat and crashed down, throwing the crew into the water and smashing the thin planks to matchwood.

The captain and second mate were both fast to whales and being towed farther and farther from the ship. The only ones aboard the *Essex* were the cabin boy and steward who managed to let go the tops'ls and bring the vessel near enough for the mate's crew to climb aboard.

"Sheet home," ordered the mate. "Break out the spare boat."

The *Essex* was slowly following the captain's and second mate's boats, and the mate's crew climbed on the after gallows to ready the spare boat to lower. Then they sighted an enormous whale breaching a hundred yards off the weather bow.

"Breaches!"

But the animal sounded and in a few minutes breached about two hundred feet away.

"He's coming at us!" shouted the mate. "Hard up, the wheel."

But the ship paid off too slowly.

The mighty head struck the *Essex* under the forechains. She staggered like a live thing and the terrified crew heard something carry away as the whale scraped along her keel.

"Pumps," ordered the mate. "She's sinking."

All hands grouped at the handles.

"There he breaches again."

The mighty animal, enraged, rolled out of the water snapping his long under-jaw.

For a moment it looked as if he would leave them. Then, suddenly, he veered and his massive flukes churned the water.

"Hard up!"

The mate jumped for the wheel, but the ship, already down by the head, could not turn and the whale's great head smashed into her with devilish fury, bringing her up all standing and staving in her bows. The men crashed to the

deck and prayed for their lives.

"Get that boat over, she's going," the mate ordered.

The steward salvaged navigating instruments from the captain's cabin and dropped them into the boat just as the ship listed madly to windward and lay over on her beam ends.

Meanwhile, the captain and second mate both had killed their whales and were towing them to where they thought the ship waited.

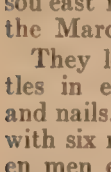
"Where's ship?" yelled one of the Negro hands suddenly.

Wildly they searched the horizon but there was no sign of a sail. They cast off and pulled for the mate's boat to hear with dismay his fantastic story.

Rowing to the wreck of the *Essex,* they cut loose the standing gear and reaching under water chopped at the masts until they gave way and allowed the sinking ship to right herself.

While some of the crew cut holes in the deck to get at the stores, Captain Pollard made an observation. They were in the middle of the Pacific, the nearest land being the Marquesas, 1500 miles sou'west and populated with dangerous savages. The crew decided to make for the South American coast 4000 miles sou'east rather than risk the dangers of the Marquesas.

They loaded water, biscuits and turtles in each boat with firearms, tools and nails. The mate's boat was smallest with six men; the other two carried seven men each. A pound and a quarter of hard-tack and a pint of water was the daily allowance. They had just time to provision the boats before the *Essex* sank.



THE following night the captain's boat was attacked by some unknown fish which stove some planks. They hove to until dawn, transferred the load to the other boats and somehow, in that tossing sea, managed to patch the broken planks with canvas.

Day after day they traveled south, dropping overside to let the cool sea relieve them from the heat. They scraped barnacles from the boat keels and a week after the wreck killed their first turtle. They drank its blood and ate every scrap, cooked in its shell.

Three weeks away from the ship they ran into fine weather and caught flying fish which they ate raw as they dropped into the boats. But the thin rations were weakening the men. Then another boat sprung a leak and men dived overboard tilting it until nails could be driven through the stove planks from the inside.

After four weeks blind sailing they sighted an island. Cheering frantically they made for it. But it proved to be little but a bird refuge. They killed the birds, eating them with grass. Then came a new dread; apparently there was no water on the island. A week of anxious search discovered a small spring and they felt that at last they were safe and could stay there until a passing ship rescued them.

Then one day they found a cave and in it were eight skeletons, and near them a tree on which was carved the word *ELIZABETH.*

It was evident that these castaways from an ancient ship had died of starvation on that island! After a few days the birds became too shy to kill and the spring dried up.

There was no time to waste. They planned to sail for Easter Island, 1000 miles due east. But three men, Chappell, Wright and Weels elected to take their chances on the island.

Leaving them, the three boats put to sea, with a little water from the spring, hard-tack and nothing else. After two weeks in broiling sunshine and icy nights the second mate died. He was sewed in his blanket and dropped overboard. His death filled them all with dismal forebodings, but there was little time to dwell on them for in January a terrible gale separated the mate's boat from the others. Then they found that they had been driven past Easter Island and the only thing to do was try for the South American mainland 2,000 miles to the east.

Provisions in the second mate's boat were soon exhausted and ten days after the storm, Shorter, a Negro died. His body was cut up, shared between the two boats and eaten! Another Negro

died and a third, from the captain's boat. They were roasted in fires made in sand in the bottom of the boats.

On January 29, 1821, the two boats were separated. Nothing was ever heard of the second mate's boat again.

Two days later those in the captain's boat, floating in a glassy sea, made a horrible decision. One must die that the others live! Lots were drawn and the short one went to Owen Coffin, the captain's nephew.

"Lad, if you don't like your lot, I'll shoot the first man as touches you," burst out the agonized captain.

"I like it as well as any other," groaned the unfortunate lad resting his head on the gunwale.

Next to go was a Negro, leaving Ramsdale, a hand, and the captain.

For several days they lived on that corpse. Then they hungered again until they crouched in opposite ends of the boat watching each other with red eyes, terrified to sleep or rest. Then Ramsdale, one morning, stared past the captain's head.

"Sail, sail!" he croaked.

It was the ship *Dauphin* that rescued them after sixty days in that small whaleboat, 4,000 miles from the wrecked *Essex*.

They arrived in Valparaiso and found the British brig *Indian* with the mate's boat's survivors. One of them was the boatsteerer Lawrence. They had a dreadful tale to tell.

Patterson, a Negro, had tried to rob the bread chest. They demanded his death but the mate forgave him. So remorseful was he that he refused to eat even his own ration and died a few days later.

The mate ripped the leather from his oar and tore at it with his teeth. Cole, a few days later, died in awful convulsions, the rest of them cowering terrified from the writhing body in the bottom of the boat. They were about to throw him overboard when the mate stopped them.

"It might save shooting someone later," he said slowly.

They stripped the poor corpse of its flesh, roasted and sundried it and managed to live for six days.

Their last two hard-tack had been ground to powder four days before. Their water was finished. They floated, lost, hopeless, too weak even to try to kill one of their number for food. Then the *Indian* sighted them and they were carried aboard her, more like sick beasts than men.

Weeks later in Valparaiso an American frigate asked the British ship, *Surrey*, to search for the three who had been left on the island. And on the morning of April 20, 1821, they were saved after four months on that barren dot in the ocean.

So out of a crew of twenty only eight survived.

Captain Lawrence would never talk of his experience. Folks said he was haunted by the sight of Cole screaming in the bottom of his boat.

THUS the ships of the Hudson River took their places among the whale hunters of the world. They risked every danger that perilous trade knew. But an end was coming.

The river ports were far from whale oil markets so they died. Farmers wouldn't invest more money in voyages; the river was closed by ice for three months out of the year. Then oil was found in Pennsylvania. Kerosene came in and whale oil went out. At one time all the street lamps of the City of London were lighted by whale oil caught by Hudson whalers. But gas was coming in and the candle works of Vassar and Jenkins were losing their business. So the whalers went back to trading and some were not above a bit of slaving when chances were good.

Whaling was a dead commerce in the Hudson, and soon after that all over the States.

Now great, greasy Jap factory ships go out with killer boats that slay whales with cannon and bombs. They mince them like hamburgers for fertilizer, and glycerine for explosives, and oil cake for animals. And they can the red beef in little cans with fine fancy labels, and sell them to natives all over the world.

They say it looks and tastes much like salmon.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

THREE new faces for the fire to shine on this month in the spot reserved for our Writers' Brigade. Hal G. Evarts, who gives us "Everest Tiger" on page 11, has this to say about himself and his story—

I got my start twenty-seven years ago in Hutchinson, Kansas, and six weeks later was moved on to Wyoming, where my father ran a fox and skunk ranch and wrote animal stories (And damn good stories they were, too! *Ed.*) on the side. The family eventually settled in Southern California, which has been home, more or less, ever since.

After graduating from Stanford University I spent fifteen months knocking around the world, chiefly in the Orient, so that most of these towns in the war communiques—from Chieng-mai to Rabaul—have a tragically familiar sound. I left Chungking in 1937 after the Jap-Chinese war began.

The background for "High Pilgrimage" I picked up from my Sherpa guide on a little tour out of Darjeeling. His name really was Friday and he really was an Everest Tiger, or so he claimed, although he had been rejected by the last expedition because of a spot on his lung.

I tried writing western originals for Republic Studio. I sold trade journal space. I worked on the San Francisco *Call-Bulletin*. My last job was a year with the late Paris Edition of the New York *Herald-Tribune*. I quit abruptly in June, 1940, the day the Germans passed Compiègne, and took part in the mass refugee flight south to Bordeaux and Lisbon.

Probably my next trip will be in some kind of uniform.

CHARLES T. S. GLADDEN, very much on active duty these days, writes—

I am a Lt. Commander in the United States Navy. Graduated from the Naval Academy in 1914 with higher athletic than scholastic honors. Am a qualified submarine commander and a naval aviator. I served with American forces in Mexico from 1912 to 1915. I helped to capture Vera Cruz and was captured by the "Bed Bugs." I met Pancho Villa and Emilio Zapata, for both of whom I have a deep admiration. I have participated in most of the Central American Revolutions since 1912, so have had more than my share of rum and frijoles.

I commanded the Naval Landing force in Cuba during the Revolution in 1916 and 1917, about which I will write when more of my friends are dead. I flew with the Marines looking for Sandino in the Nicaraguan jungles—we caught up with him once and bombed the hell out of him—but it took General Moncado to prop-

erly settle the situation. By some error, yet unexplained, I was a member of President Hoover's Mission to Nicaragua in 1930 and a paper in Granada used an entire edition to describe my villainy.

I spent eight years in submarines and started flying in 1918 and am still alive, so have had more than my share of luck. *Adventure's* acceptance of my story proves that it is still lasting. I hope you will hear from me frequently through the same channel.

So do we, Commander, and best of luck to you, in our magazine or out, for a long time to come. Keep 'em flying!

WALTER C. BROWN who wrote "Black Pigeons" is a Pennsylvanian, the author of three novels and many short stories which have appeared in various magazines. He says—

I have always been profoundly interested in China and the Chinese way of life, both in its native setting and in the American Chinatowns. The Chinese are a truly fascinating people, and it is too bad that the average American thinks of them only as a nation of Cantonese laundrymen. So I hope that my tale will help give a little different slant on the subject. For my part, it is intended as a small tribute to a gallant and peace-loving nation which is now writing military history, and will continue to do so.

Anyway, I'm very happy to pull up to the *Camp-Fire* and say "Hello!" to everybody. I've been a reader of *Adventure* for a good many years, and I'm proud to join the circle of writing men who have dropped in here to swap yarns.

ACCORDING to the *Official Congressional Directory for the Use of the United States Congress*, the Hydrographic Office, Bureau of Navigation, Department of the Navy—

—is charged with topographic and hydrographic surveys in foreign waters and on the high seas; the collection and dissemination of hydrographic and navigational information and data; the preparation and printing by its own personnel and with its own equipment of maps and charts relating to and required in navigation, including confidential, strategical, and tactical charts required for naval operations and maneuvers; the preparation and issue of sailing directions (pilots), light lists, pilot charts, navigational manuals, periodicals, and radio broadcasts for the use of all vessels of the United States and for the benefit and use of navigators generally; the furnishing of the foregoing to the Navy and other public services, and the sale to the mercantile marine of all nations and to the general public, at the cost of printing and paper. It maintains intimate relations with the hydrographic offices of all foreign countries and with the International Hydrographic Bureau, Monaco, and (through branch hydrographic offices and sales agents) with mariners and the general public.

The Hydrographic Office prepares special charts for the use of aviators, covering the coastal areas of the United States and foreign countries; disseminates through Notices to Aviators information relative to aids to aerial navigation and aviation facilities; prepares and publishes plotting sheets, plotting instruments, and navigational tables especially designed for aviation use; and carries out research into the science of aerial navigation.

The Hydrographic Office cooperates with the National Academy of Sciences by conducting research work in oceanography, especially in soundings and in the collection of the temperatures of the surface of the sea.

Couching his description of the Office in slightly less formal phraseology the author of "A Bottle a Day" says—

About H.O. You can call it the Hydrographic Office, U. S. Navy, Washington, D. C. if you feel like it, because that is its official name, but I always think of it as the Headache Office.

Does the wind blow more often from northeast or from due east ninety miles east of the Marianas, Western Pacific, during the month of June? What force? Now, how about November? Thanks. By the way, what is the name of that small village four miles east of Punta Cauca, Gulf of Venezuela? Rio Seco? Well, can I get in there drawing seventeen feet? And while you're at it, whatever became of that derelict sighted last February off the west coast of Greenland? And I'm afraid I've forgotten the population of Madagascar. What are gnomonic charts useful for, anyhow? Have you got a picture of Chinchorro Bank Lighthouse handy?

Talk about your Quiz Kids or Information Please! My money is on the Headache Office every time. They must be

right, too, always. Somebody may lose a ship if they aren't right. And they not only tell you about it in a Pilot book; they give you a chart, too. Is that leading with the chin? Think of all the snorty old salts all over the world ready to swing at the slightest slip.

And mind you, the stuff has got to be kept up to date. You can't write a book about something and then relax. That volcanic island off Trinidad on Page so and so of the *West Indies Pilot*, Vol. II, may have done a quiet sneak back under water. Or it may have doubled in height. You've got to watch these things, you know.

Yes, most able-bodied men would probably like a good berth in the Navy right now. But my advice to you is that if anybody mentions a nice desk in the Hydrographic Office start running or buy yourself a ton of aspirin pills. No wonder the joint requires the aid of all sea-going gents, including the hero of "A Bottle a Day."

Japan has a Hydrographic Office, too. The hissing little monkey men from the land of cherry blossoms and chicanery who operated a fleet of high-powered "fishing" craft off our west coast for so many years were much more interested in soundings than tuna. Let's hope the *sake* bottles they hurled, even as young Mr. Fordyce cast empty gin flasks, shattered to smithereens on submerged rocks —every one!

AS a final footnote to "Live by the Sword" F. R. Buckley appends the following—

There are two schools of thought on the whole subject of the Borgias, and in no matter are their opinions more sharply divided than in this of the illness which wrecked the Borgian empire. Most contemporary writers say the pope and his son were laid low in the manner described in "Live by the Sword"; but it would have been equally permissible to take the opposite view—that they fell victims to that malignant tertian malaria which has so profoundly affected history in all ages.

And it seems to me that if one does take that view, the fall of the House of Borgia becomes even more significant.

As the story tells—Cesare and his father had built up, by the evening of that fatal dinner, what we should now call a water-tight political machine. All the power, military and religious, was in their hands; either of them could use it in the absence of the other; and neither of them had one solitary restraining scruple. They knew what they wanted, and they were going after it with simple, brutal realism.

But (if the malaria theory is correct) —there was in their vicinity that evening a female mosquito of the anopheles variety who, for the production of her young, needed a supply of human blood. And, seeing Alexander VI and the Duke of Valentinois, she quite simply and realistically took it from them; incidentally shooting into their bloodstreams certain mieroscopic parasites. She wished them no harm; she was just functioning according to her nature; possibly, a moment later, she landed on some scullion or other and was slapped into nothingness.

But with two touches of her almost invisible proboscis, she had defeated all the armies of Cesare Borgia, all his new guns, all his lances; she had brought to nothing all his hours of scheming, flung back in his face all his bribes, reduced a Pope and a Duke to pauperism and condemned them to death—overthrown the whole mighty fabric they had built with such pains and skill. They could fight—and had fought, and overcome—practically everything visible; but the invisible was too much for the Borgias.

It seems to be the invisible, the unconsidered trifle (such as the common man, who is invisible in the mass of his fellows) that always is too much for tyrants.

Maybe that's what Isaiah had in mind when he wrote that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Anyhow we shall see.

We have been reading with great interest the reviews of Count Carlo Beuf's new biography of Borgia, "Cesare Borgia, the Machiavellian Prince" just published by the Oxford University Press. From them we gather that the author has drawn a rather different picture of the man than did Mr. Buckley in his novel. We are anxious to read the book as will be many of you who have just finished "Live by the Sword." It would be interesting to have the author of the serial review the work for us here and we'll try to persuade him to do so.

FROM William A. Nelson of Northfield, Mass., comes the following letter of comment on "East of the Williwaw" with a request for information on how to handle the weapon the scar-faced gaucho in our serial used so effectively.

While Leslie T. White's serial, "East of the Williwaw," was running last summer, I was down in South America doing an 18,000 mile jaunt by bike, train, horse, steamer, or any means of locomotion that would get us around. We didn't get down as far as Punta Arenas, but did get a look at Puerto Varas before we crossed the Chilean Lakes into the Argentine. Fascinating country all right, even during the wet and cold winter season. Having seen most of what Mr. White was talking about, the descriptions and expressions were doubly interesting; which leads to a couple of questions I hope you can put me straight on.

I don't know about Tierra del Fuego, or just what nationality lives there, but it is part of Chile, and a ranch in that country is called a hacienda, not estancia, which is Argentine. However, this is trivial, and the main thing I wanted to ask about was the throwing of the boleadorus, or bola. I picked one up in Buenos Aires, but think the shopkeeper didn't know much about its manipulation. He said to hold the ball on the shortest of the three strands, the other two are equal length, in one hand, and swing the other two around my head by grasping them where they joined, then let the whole thing fly. White has Matè Cocido twirl the bola by hanging onto one of the balls, and I'd like to know if that is the McCoy. I haven't practiced much with mine up here, as it is a heavy model and really a deadly weapon. As far as I can see, none of the *Ask Adventure* experts seem to cover bola throwing, so I'm writing you in hopes you can lend a hand or tell me who to get in touch with.

Despite the fact that Author White has traded Tierra del Fuego for a new fiction stamping ground closer to the top of the world than the bottom (see *Trail Ahead*), he can be persuaded to doff mukluks and parka and don bombachas again at the drop of a bola. We sent Mr. Nelson's letter out to him in California to see what he could do with it and here's what came back—picture and all—

Dear Mr. Nelson:

Glad you enjoyed "East of the Williwaw." Had more real fun writing that yarn than any I've done in a long, long time. Next to the Canadian northwoods, the place I'd like to visit best of all once again is that legendary Land of Fire—Tierra del Fuego.

In Chile proper, as in the Argentine, they have their correct names for everything. So you're quite right when you differentiate between the *hacienda* of Chile and the *estancia* of Argentina. But if you will check your map, you'll find that the active portion of Tierra del Fuego belongs to the Argentine; as a matter of fact, they privately lay claim to the whole territory. However, I found the Argentine influence predominating in the region where I laid my yarn, and since the natives called the ranches estancias, I saw no reason to argue the point.

L. T. W. with bombachas and bola

Apparently you made the same error I did when you purchased your boleadora—you got the "cattle" size instead of the slightly smaller one used in ostrich hunting. However, with practice you can handle it for short throws, but

I suggest you don't try it on any living thing, for it's a murderous weapon.

If your boleadora is properly made, you'll find that one strand is slightly shorter than the other two, and the attached ball is also a trifle smaller. These are technically called the mañeque cord, and the mañeque ball. This mañeque ball is held in the right hand and becomes the hub around which the others revolve.

This weapon was the most characteristic of the old-time gaucho's equipment, which he, in turn, adopted from the Indians. As you know, it was mostly used from horseback, the technique being to hold the mañeque ball in the right hand above the head and swing the other two towards the ground almost vertically. Once going in that direction, the gaucho swings it horizontally around his head, then vertically again. Just as the two free balls start forward, he throws the mañeque ball at the object he hopes to truss up. If you're courageous enough to try it from a galloping horse, be darned careful you don't snag him. It's no toy.

The old-time gaucho used to use the boleadora in private fighting, using the same technique as if it were a long thonged black-jack. Against the Indian lance, it was often very effective, until the gaucho could work close enough to polish off his enemy with his pet *facôn*. In popular slang of the time, he referred to the boleadora as his *Three Marias*.

When I was up in the Chaco, the natives used a very small boleadora for hunting small birds, like pheasant or their equivalent. The balls in this case were usually lead shot, and the thongs of fish twine, about twelve to fourteen inches in length. The natives wore this contraption around their necks, like a necklace, so as to have it convenient. They are remarkably adept with it.

Best of luck, and don't hang yourself with that big boleadora.

Sincerely,
Leslie T. White

ALL the way from New Zealand came the following interesting comment on Maurice Beam's tiger yarn which we printed back in the September '41 issue.

I have been a regular reader of and subscriber to *Adventure* for twenty-five years and read Maurice Beam's story "The Gentleman and the Tiger" four times in as many days. It is one of the best you have published. But the cold, presumably German, reasoning of the Tigerman was not a hundred per cent correct. Even so, the moral retribution that overtook him was accidental—he would have been right nine times out of ten. Where he failed in his reasoning was as follows: When he realized that the tiger was also on the island he should have accepted the fact that under the conditions the tiger was fittest to survive. He had reasoned out the approximate time and place of the rescue steamer's arrival. Reason should have shown him that his only chance was to take to his piece of wood again and swim out to sea on the chance of being picked up—a long chance but the only one. He had plenty of opportunities to adopt that course. But a great story.

P. C. Sanford,
Box 160 Te Aro P.O.
Wellington, N. Z.

We hustled a transcript of Reader Sanford's letter along to the author of the story, who lives in California, and back came a copy of his reply to the critic "down under" which we print herewith—

Dear Mr. Sanford:

I liked the compliments you accorded my story, "The Gentleman and the Tiger" in September *Adventure*, and must needs fly to defend the strictures you put upon it.

I can't believe a reasoning man like Zimmerman, the story's protagonist, would have risked putting to sea again on his tiny board because such an act would have contradicted the keynote of his character, which was self-esteem. He was convinced that he was superior to his environment, including the tiger and the Malay boy, Afu. Moreover, it was shown that the waters were shark-infested. Thirdly, a man in the top of even a low-growing coconut tree is more readily visible than the same man with only his head above water. Let us say that Zimmerman thought of that, too, admitting that the story might have been stronger had this been indicated in the body of the tale.

To say that Zimmerman's defeat was accidental and that he would have been right (that is, victorious) nine times out of ten is not, I believe, quite accurate. Zimmerman's conflict for survival was not with the tiger so much as with Afu, whom he so callously tried to drown. Afu survived; ergo, Afu was the fittest of the three since the tiger must also be

presumed to have perished after he ate Zimmy. It was certainly no accident that Afu opened the tiger's bamboo cage, allowing the beast to escape, thus causing Zimmerman's downfall, or that Afu was the reason for the rescue ship's giving up the search.

However, all this is abstract polemic too readily bandied by both of us. There was, I am informed, one error of fact in the story that cannot be explained away. A friend at California Institute of Technology, a very scientific guy, says that I failed to explain how the coconut trees got on Zimmerman's island. In the story it was stated that chance currents carried nuts there and they sprouted, an accepted belief so far as I am aware. My friend holds that actual experiments have shown that coconuts floated in water of ocean salinity for fifty hours or more never germinate when planted in soil. Perhaps some of your Maori friends can answer this one. If they do, I'd appreciate learning just how those trees got on Zimmerman Island as well as upon others throughout the South Pacific.

Thanks for your good letter to *Adventure.*

Sincerely,
Maurice Beam.

Anyone else want to take up cudgels in defense of either Reader Sanford or Author Beam? And can anyone answer the coconut problem?

FROM J. C. McKean of Pittsburgh, Pa., comes the following letter relative to H. P. S. Greene's article in the March issue on the colorful career of Red Lopez, the Mexican guerrilla raider.

I have just read with interest Mr. Greene's story of "Senor Lopez" and his exploit of Agua Prieta, in the current issue of *Adventure.* The "unnamed civilian" who crossed the line with Capt. Caujot was my brother, Charles W. McKean.

Capt. Caujot could not speak Spanish so Charley went along and did all the talking. Charley had quite a record as a soldier himself, but at that time was not in the army. He served three years on the Mexican border in the 23d Inft. U.S.A., was in Cuba during the Spanish-American war with the 3rd Vol. Engrs., was a Captain in World War I, and later a Major and finally Lieut. Colonel in the Arizona National Guard. He died several years ago. If he was ever afraid of anything or anybody I never knew it. He of course took the same risk as Capt. (then Lieut.) Caujot in this trip across the line and in the face of Mexican rifles, but it seems civilians do not, or anyway at the time did not, rate medals for bravery no matter how great the service rendered.

Some magazine (I think it was the S. E. Post) had a write-up of this soon after it occurred. In any event, the facts I have stated can easily be verified.

Mr. Greene, to whom we sent a copy of the letter, wrote to Reader McKean as follows—

Dear Mr. McKean:

I am very glad indeed to have identified, finally, the "unrecorded civilian," who, in my story about Red Lopez, crossed the International Line between Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora under heavy fire with Capt. Julien E. Gaujot when the latter won the Congressional Medal.

I got most of the story from Mrs. Alice Gatliff, at whose Curio Cafe in Agua Prieta I used to dine frequently in Prohibition days, and then verified dates and other facts as far as possible in the files of the Douglas *Daily Dispatch.* The account in the *Dispatch* read—"Capt. Gaujot and a civilian." I queried a number of oldtimers about the identity of the civilian, and received various contradictory answers, so I just had to let it go at that.

It happens that Mr. K. Stewart, a long-time resident of Cochise County, is living near me at present, and was in Douglas during the Lopez affair. Mr. Stewart says that now he is reminded of it, he remembers about your brother, whom he knew when he was surveying the railroad—since torn up, and sold, presumably to the Japs—from Douglas to Courtland. By a queer coincidence, Mr. Stewart also went to school with Gaujot in Ontario, and knew him all of his life.

My attention is drawn to the fact that I spelled the name Gaujot, and you—Caujot. I'm quite sure my spelling is right, because I knew the then Lieut-Col. Gaujot well when he was Executive Officer of Fort Bliss, near El Paso, and I was on duty there in the Air Corps Reserve. Also, I looked him up in the Army Register to make sure of the spelling of his first name—Julien, and his initial,—E.

With thanks for the information, and your interest,

Sincerely,
H. P. S. Greene

Another reader, whose scrawled signature we couldn't decipher, unfortunately, and the postmark on whose letter was blurred, so we can't even tell where he hails from, writes, in reference to the same article—

I was confused about the exact status of Col. Medina and his relationship to Lopez at the end of Mr. Greene's article.

As I understand it, Medina was an officer in the federal army and Lopez was a guerrilla more or less off on his own. They collaborated in the assault on Agua Prieta, then jealousy arose and by default Col. Medina was left in command of the town. Was it not federal troops that Medina and Lopez were attacking when they first came to Agua Prieta? Therefore, how come Medina —who must have been a traitor in the first place—gets back in with the federals and sends Lopez to his death to a federal prison? When was Medina accepted into the bosom of the federals? There must have been some sort of turnabout that isn't explained in the article.

And Author Greene attempts to clarify, in this wise—

Of course Medina was a "political," rather than a fighting officer, and a traitor from the federal viewpoint. He got Red Lopez, a battling fool, and an idealist in his crude way, to do the fighting for him, and then grew jealous when everybody gave all the credit to Red, as they naturally would.

When the Federal Army recaptured Agua Prieta, Medina and Lopez and all their men who could navigate or be dragged escaped to safety in Douglas, Arizona. Then each man behaved according to his character. Lopez went and joined the rebel army which was attacking Juarez, while Medina lay doggo in Douglas. After his outfit had captured Juarez, and there was no more action there, Red returned to Douglas by rail from El Paso.

In the meantime, the Federal Army, in the belief that they had crushed all rebellion around Agua Prieta, marched away to put down another uprising elsewhere. As soon as they had gone the population of the town, aided by rebels who had recrossed the Line from Douglas, easily overpowered the few officials and guards whom the Federals had left behind, and re-established a rebel regime in the town. Medina, as soon as the trouble was over, characteristically went back himself and assumed command. He'd said what he'd do to Lopez if he came back, and Red was warned not to go to Agua Prieta, as told in the story. Medina said that Lopez had deserted him who was doing nothing, because Red went and fought for the same rebel cause at Juarez!

Of course it is immaterial who controlled the big prison near Mazatlan at the moment. Starting Red Lopez for there was merely a gag to get him out of town where he still had many friends, and shoot him under the *ley de fuga.* What I mean is that the prison is "federal" all same Atlanta, not in the sense of either the Federal or Rebel armies. I see where the confusion arose, for Medina and Lopez were both rebels from start to finish of the piece.

Everything clear now, Mr. X?

A FEW months ago we printed in *Ask Adventure* a query about black widow spiders from James W. Redding of Rifle, Colo. In answering it S. W. Frost, our entomological expert, asserted that the bites of "even full-grown spiders are not as serious as they are sometimes reported." Right back at Dr. Frost came the following blast—

Dear Sir:—

I can tell you from experience that they are damned serious!

I can also describe to you or Mr. Redding what the effects and sensations are, if it is of interest.

I do not understand why that old controversy continues as it does. I have heard State Entomologists say that they would let a widow bite them any time. I have also watched papers for the past thirty years and noted authentic cases where people have died from it.

The difference of opinion, I am sure, is due to variables such as the condition "the lady" is in and the thickness of the skin through which her short fangs pass,

and how much venom actually gets into the blood-stream.

From experience, I am satisfied that DEATH where it occurs is simply from the excruciating PAIN. Most deaths have been cases of young, old or weakened people who probably just could not stand the torture. It's HELL.

Yours truly,
Wilbur R. Smith,
2126 Kennedy St.
Philadelphia, Pa.

We sent Mr. Smith's letter along to Dr. Frost for additional comment, if any, and this is what our *A. A.* man answers—

It seems that the black widow is pretty well named. She is a popular lady who finds herself the subject of much gossip. I have a file full of clippings from various newspapers. It is interesting to read them over. The titles read something like this: "The black widow spider is fatal to gardener"—"The black widow used in suicide"—"Black widow victim succumbs," etc. None of the accounts are clear as to the exact cause of the trouble. In the excitement the spider is felt but is seldom seen. The doctor asks to see the spider that has attacked the victim but the reply is generally, "The spider got away." Sometimes it is even difficult for the doctor to administer relief because he is not sure of his diagnosis. The story of the attack is often magnified by retelling the account until it finally reaches the newspaper much distorted.

All authentic accounts state that the bite of this spider is not fatal to adults. The amount of venom is comparatively small. All agree with Mr. Smith that the experience is damned serious. The effect of the bite generally lasts for three days and is accompanied by high temperature, violent sickness and severe pain. I believe it can be quite serious with some patients. Others seem to suffer little from its bite. I am personally acquainted with Dr. W. J. Baerg who has allowed the black widow to bite him. The results were studied carefully under a physician's care and have been published in technical papers. There are other authentic accounts of patients that have been bitten by the black widow and have survived.

Recent reports have been published on antivenin used with some success against the bite of the black widow. The commercial product is known as Lejovac antivenin. Satisfactory results were obtained in two out of eight cases treated. Each dose contains the equivalent, in neutralizing power, of the venom of at least 750 spiders. Thus the medical profession realizes the seriousness of the bite of this spider, especially in the case of certain patients, and is attempting to find more satisfactory means of relief.

Therefore let us not gossip about the black widow. She may be a bad actor at times but as far as we know is not fatal.

Anybody else want to offer further testimony—direct evidence only, please, for the court can't admit hearsay to the record—on the lethal or non-lethal widow's might? (Watch those puns! We told ourselves that once before, but it doesn't seem to have had much effect.)

THE suggestion has come from several readers that we arrange an "Old-Timers'" issue, building the contents with stories by well-known authors who got their start in *Adventure* and are still going strong. We think the suggestion is a good one with a heap of merit and we'd jump at the idea, IF—

If we could get even three people, for instance, to agree on just what constitutes an "old-timer." There'd be a lot of work involved (we aren't afraid of that, of course) and a lot of consensus-taking of opinion on what to include (and that would be revealing and interesting) and then a ream of explaining and pacifying of those who were disappointed at what we didn't include (but we're explainers and pacifiers from way back) and—and—and—

We'd like to hear a few further reactions and get a variety of slants on the idea, however, before we barge into serious operations.

For instance—we'll need some help in reconciling the guy who recalls the "good old days" of ten years ago with the reader who still thinks back to the winter of 1910 as the heyday and high spot—and then there'll be all those in between. Maybe we're just looking for trouble but maybe there's some way to work it out and keep everybody reasonably happy. Shall we try?—K. S. W.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Veteran William Daniel disappeared May, 1921, from the home of his parents, 4501-4th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y. Served as corporal, Battery D, 62nd Field Artillery; was honorably discharged Dec. 31, 1918, a private, 314 Cavalry, Camp Owen, Texas. Last seen in Los Angeles, 1921. Was a licensed radio operator, had been a jockey, and had made several trips to Central and South America, as a seaman. Anyone knowing his whereabouts, please communicate with Veterans Administration, Washington, D. C., giving reference number XC-2,985,049.

Would like to hear from my son, James E. Richards, and daughter, Genevieve Maxine Richards, whom I haven't seen or heard from since 1924. Last seen in Denver, Colo. Believe they later went to Florida, with their mother. James H. Richards, Elk Mtn. Rt., Box 9, New Castle, Wyo.

82nd Division Veterans contact your Association at 28 East 39 Street, New York City. Elwood C. Ellinger, Secretary.

Would like to contact any members of Battery C, 43rd Coast Artillery Corps from Camp Eustin, Va., from Jan. 1, 1921 to July 2, 1921. My father, Clifford V. St. Clair, was in that Battery, and I am hoping some of the members have seen him or know of his whereabouts. Please communicate with his son, whom he never saw, L. G. St. Clair, 2365 Sutter St., San Francisco, Cal.

Would like to hear from my brother, Charles W. Leach Lewis, generally called Charlie. He left Columbus, Ohio, in 1898 for Dallas, Texas. Had light hair, blue eyes; was painter, paper hanger and lather, also cook. Would be about 67 or 68 years old now. N. F. Leach Talbott, 916 Cleveland Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

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ASK ADVENTURE

(Continued from page 8)

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(2) In what localities are these animals most numerous?

(3) What are some of the technical difficulties of capturing and transporting live chinchillas?

(4) What other fur bearing animals live in the regions where chinchillas are found?

(5) What are some of the tribes of Indians living in those regions; are they hostile?

(6) Have you any information available about the mountain ranges in Venezuela and Colombia which are claimed to be totally or partially unexplored?

(7) Could you give me the titles of any books where I might obtain additional information on the subject?

—Sol Lipsitz
114-10th Ave.,
San Francisco, Cal.

Reply by Edgar Young:—1. Due to the varying prices of chinchilla pelts it is hard to quote a set price, as these furs are in the luxury class. The Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., due to a government rule, will not quote the import price, or name of importer, but they are not forbidden to name the trade magazines in any industry, and if you will write them for these and then write the publishers for a sample copy of the magazine, you will find the importers' advertising; and you can write them direct for current prices on chinchillas. The fur department of Sears, Roebuck and Co., Chicago, Ill., might be able to quote current prices. They range from

(Continued on page 127)

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

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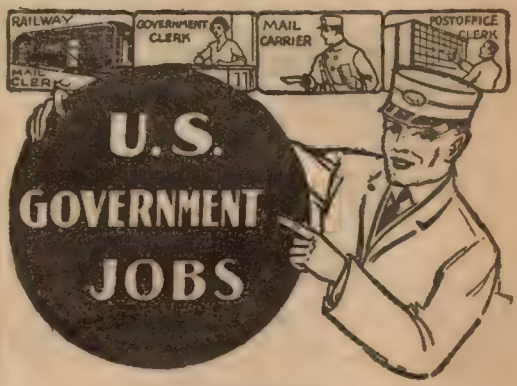

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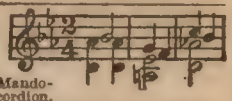

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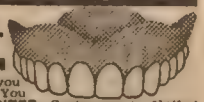

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Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

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Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, New York City.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders* — MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Pa.

Forestry: *in the United States, national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure*.

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS H. HALL, 446 Ocean Av., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *anywhere in No. America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, 11628¾ Mayfield Ave., West Los Angeles, Calif.

The Merchant Marine. GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping — RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Field Artillery, *the Cavalry Arm, Equitation and training of horses*—FAIRFAX DOWNEY, care of *Adventure*.

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 48 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edw., H. S., Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 48 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure*.

U. S. Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★**New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 89 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

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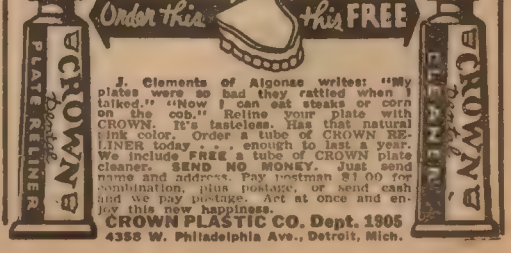

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(Continued from page 122)

$5 to $30 a pelt, according to condition, as a rule. Live chinchillas are exceedingly hard to obtain on account of Bolivia putting a ban on the exporting of these rodents. There was a man raising them out around Pueblo, Colo., and I saw an article in a magazine about it a few years ago, but I have forgotten the man's name and exact town. The curator of some zoo, such as the Bronx Park Zoological Garden, New York City, might be able to tell you how to obtain them.

2. Eastern slopes of the Andes, mainly in Bolivia, but some few in southern Peru on that side, and northern Chile on same side of the mountains. They are cousins to the prairie dogs of this country and Argentine, but have evolved a long middle toe with which they scale the sides of cliffs, and they live back in crevices. The local Indians down there are about the only ones who can trap them.

3. As above mentioned, also the remoteness of their habitat in South America.

4. Not very many. See Bolivia, Chile, and Peru; under *fauna*, in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

5. Mainly Quechuans and Aymaras. They are surly but friendly.

6. Quite a bit of the mentioned country is unexplored.

7. Send 5c (coin) for each of the following booklets to Pan American Union, Washington, D. C.: COLOMBIA; PERU; BOLIVIA; VENEZUELA; CHILE. Also read each article under same heading in the Encyclopedia Britannica at your public library.

See if the head of the zoo there in San Francisco can't help you obtain chinchillas.

(Continued on page 129)

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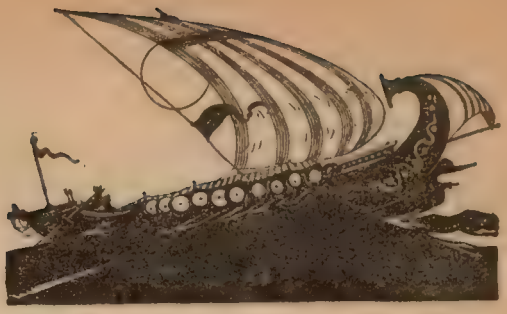

All the Norsefolk were farfarers before the days of the Black Plague, and the keels of their longboats rived the seas from the Orkneys to the Golden Horn. First among them, ever sailing in the viking van, was Swain—Jarlmaker and Kingsbane—his long sword, Skullbiter, in hand, keened to carve plunder from paynim and Irish rover alike. Arthur D. Howden Smith in—

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Did you know "We Licked 'em Once?" Major ANTHONY FIALA, in an unusually timely fact story, tells of the *first* time the United States Navy wiped up a Jap fleet in the Pacific. It was back in 1863, in case you've forgotten, or didn't even know about it; "Indian Transfer" by HARRY BEDWELL is a chuckle-laden story demonstrating how clothes can make—and break—even the toughest railroader that ever braked a hotshot; then there's "The Duel" by JIM KJELGAARD, a gripping tale of the fur trade; "Rivermen" by HELEN von KOLNITZ HYER, another fine ballad in the Paul Bunyan tradition; plus the usual departments and features you can't find anywhere else but in—

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(Continued from page 127)

BACK in a flash with no flash!

Request:—Being an amateur camera fan, I am writing in hopes that you can help me. Having had very good luck in speed shots and hard-to-get subjects like photos of the moon, I find one object that so far has eluded me. This happens to be vivid lightning flashes. Jan. 31, this year, we had a freak electric storm and try as I would, I could not get a good shot. My lens is F/8:8 and 1/100 sec. What would you suggest for a camera of this type?

—Gilbert C. Trabbold,
205 Hamilton St.,
Darby, Pa.

Reply by Paul L. Anderson:—It is impossible to photograph lightning in the usual snapshot fashion. The time lag in the human neuro-muscular system is from 1/8 second to 1 second, depending on the individual; and the time lag in a camera shutter is from 1/25 second to 1 second, depending on the type and condition of the shutter. Since the duration of a lightning flash is well under 1/1000 second, as a rule, the flash is nicely over before you have even begun to make the exposure.

The way to do it is this: Choose a window looking toward the storm, and open it; set the camera on a table or other solid support, aimed in the probable direction of the lightning; stop the lens down to F/16 or F/22; focus on infinity; and open the shutter. When a flash has occurred in the area covered by the camera, close the shutter and wind the film along. It is well to make a number of exposures in this manner, and it is well, though not imperative, to use a rather slow film, such as Panatomic X or Pentagon.

Most flashes are from cloud to cloud, but the most spectacular ones are generally from a cloud to the earth. Therefore it is well, for pictorial reasons, to include some of the landscape—say 1/4 or 1/5 of the film area. Also, since a nice transparence in the sky adds much to the picture, take care not to overdevelop the film.

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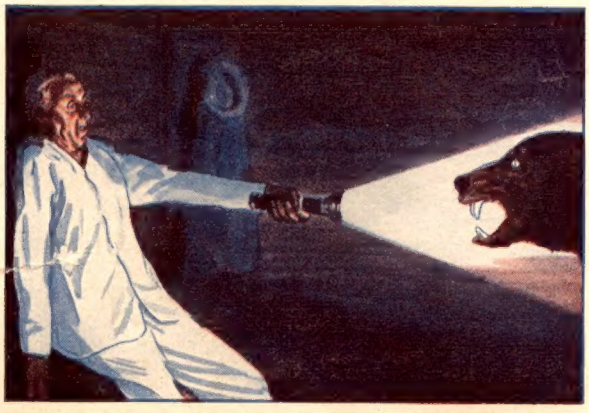
1 **"A TERRIFIC CRASH** startled me right out of bed one night as I slept in the cook house of the mining camp where I work," writes Mr. McIlwraith. "Half awake, I rushed into the kitchen to investigate—and found a huge bear had broken in and was tearing into our food supplies.

2 **"MADDENED** by my interruption and savage from hunger, the great creature started for me. My only thought was to get away from him—*and fast*—as these big cinnamons can be bad medicine in close quarters. I darted back into my room. Then to my horror I realized that the bedroom windows were too small for me to get through.



3 **"IN A NIGHTMARE** of panic, I broke out in a cold sweat. Then I remembered my flashlight. Desperately, I grabbed it from a shelf, whirled and flashed it full in the bear's face. He stopped short. Baffled growls came from his dripping jaws . . . and he turned and lumbered out of the shack. It's my hunch that I was one step from being mincemeat when I picked up that 'Eveready' flashlight with its dependable *fresh* DATED batteries.

(Signed) R. S. McIlwraith"

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